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OR,
**Gabe Ganderfoot's : -
Mississippi Man-Hunt.**

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DETECTIVE," "SINGER SAM," "LODE-
STONE LEM," "TEAMSTER TOM,"
"PRINCE PRIMROSE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A THRILLING RACE.

A FIERCE, hot glare, that paled and almost blotted out the calm and peaceful moonlight, stained the great river to a bloody red, painted the overhanging clouds in angry colors, and sent burning shafts of light into the dark woods to scare the feathered and furred night prowlers and cause them to seek denser and gloomier retreats!

This hot glare came from the furnaces

THE CRESCENT CITY SPORT STRUCK WITH SUCH FORCE THAT THE RUFFIAN
REELED BACKWARD INTO THE SWIFTLY FLOWING RIVER.

and funnels of two passenger boats, that were racing side by side down the mighty Mississippi, churning the muddy water into foam and plowing furrows that small tugs might hide in; while their machinery strained and heaved and their timbers vibrated under the racking thud of mighty engines.

Two finer boats never struggled for the mastery. From Cairo almost to New Orleans the race had been well-nigh continuous. And now a final burst of speed and endurance was to decide which should be the victor.

Their white outlines glittered with a wild and almost unearthly beauty beneath the glare of the fires, and the upper works of each seemed of so fragile a character that a blow might break them in.

Yet they were stanch boats—among the best and most costly made in that heyday of steamboating and steamboat building. We build no such magnificent craft, now, at the century's close; for the railway long ago ruined the river as a passenger thoroughfare.

The Princess, which was slightly in the lead, was from Cincinnati, as the big letters on her paddle-boxes showed, while her rival was from St. Louis, and was named the River Queen.

They had met near Cairo—one having swung swiftly down the Mississippi to that point, and the other down the Ohio—and the racing, which had been continued at intervals ever since, was then begun.

Less than fifty miles now separated them from the Crescent City, where their present voyages were to end.

Though of such common occurrence in that time, these races were always fraught with great danger; but now the danger was much increased by the drift that covered the river's surface.

Great logs bumped and ground against each other and against the hulls of the boats; and masses of driftwood, together with whole trees, torn from their native soil, tossed and dipped on the muddy current that rushed wildly toward the Gulf.

The Mississippi had been steadily rising for hours, until the waters now backed away into the drowned woodlands, wherever there were no protecting levees, and the river had in places grown to the seeming proportions of a shoreless sea.

But the passengers on the rival boats gave little care to this; except such of them as had plantations and homes in those drowned lowlands over which the funnel lights flared.

One of these, though apparently careless of the fact, was a gaunt Southerner—Colonel Jackson Mayport. He was upward of sixty years of age, grizzled of beard and hair, with a dark and sallow complexion, and a bright, dark eye.

Much of the woodland they were passing belonged to Mayport, and he had a plantation or two somewhere out there beyond the flood, while his own home, on higher ground, was but a mile or two below.

Yet none of these things stirred the doughty southern colonel, who smoked his expensive cigars and thumbed the cards with as much zest as if the engines were not racking, and the drift grinding against the sides of the River Queen.

Colonel Mayport had come down from St. Louis, with his lovely daughter, Miss Fannie Mayport, and the two expected to be put ashore just above New Orleans, where a darky and carriage would be in waiting.

The colonel's opponent at cards was a youngish man, giving his name as Wintrop Scales, but who had been dubbed the Crescent City Sport.

There was something prepossessing about the young gamester, notwithstanding the career he led. It was quite apparent that he had been reared to better things than gambling, and those who observed him closely did not fail to notice that he was given to abstracted walks about the decks, as if he were not altogether pleased with himself or the life he was leading.

Yet no one accused him of not being a thorough sport—least of all the colonel, out of whose pockets had gone several hundred dollars during his run down the river.

But the excitement of the renewed race between the River Queen and the Princess drew Colonel Jackson Mayport and his

young competitor from their fascinating game to the upper decks, where a view of the race was to be had.

Below, at the furnace, muscular negroes, naked to the waist and bathed in sweat, fed the hungry fires, that roared and leaped, as if they meant to break through their iron cages, and, devouring the big side-wheeler, burn such a hole in the night that the memory of it would not be forgotten.

It was terrible to stand before those awful furnaces, heated like those of scripture story to seven times their natural heat; but it was those furnaces that gave birth to the steamy demons that drove the racking boats on through the rolling flood!

That the River Queen was gaining was quickly apparent to Colonel Jackson and the Crescent City Sport, as they came on the deck; and, in consequence, their interest was intensified.

"Can't you get a little more out of her, captain?" Mayport roared, addressing the commander of the River Queen, who walked near, the embodiment of suppressed excitement. "By George, we can't afford to let them beat us! Can't you crowd her a little?" "We're crowding the furnaces with all they'll hold!" the captain roared back. "If our wood was a little better! But that last we took on is a little damp; curse the luck!"

"You've got a lot of bacon below!" suggested the Southerner.

The captain stopped and looked at him. "Two thousand dollars' worth! But, who's to pay for that, if it's burned?"

The colonel compressed his lips and looked across to the rival steamboat; saw the pilot of the Princess holding his craft steadily on her way; saw the leaping of the fires and heard their roaring; and saw that the River Queen had ceased to gain.

"I will!" he cried, with an expressive bit of profanity. "Here! Captain, get me a piece of paper and a pen and ink, and go to rolling in that bacon!"

The captain understood, and screamed a command. The bacon was snatched up and heaved toward the fires; and pen, ink and paper were put before the impetuous southern colonel.

"There!" said Mayport, with a flourish, thrusting a written check into the captain's hands. "That bacon is mine—the whole two thousand dollars' worth. Mine, do you hear! Pile it into the fire! We're not going to be beat by no hump-backed boat from Cincinnati!"

He shook his fist at the rival craft, and then went down to see for himself that the bacon was being fed to the eager furnaces.

A smell of cooking meat pervaded the boat almost instantly. The flames grew blacker and oilier, and the smoke denser, while the heat became appalling.

The River Queen, under the impetus thus given her, leaped forward like a struggling monster. The paddle-wheels spun around like veritable water furies, drenching everything near; the thump of the engines became louder; the steam-gauges showed a dangerous degree of pressure; but no one heeded it in those moments of excitement. To every passenger on the River Queen—and on the Princess as well—there was but one object in life, and that object was to win—to win, if the boat went to the bottom in consequence.

The feeling of fear was held in abeyance, for the time being.

"Heave 'er in!" yelled the colonel, encouragingly, as he saw the straining negroes tossing the bacon into the yawning furnaces.

"That's mine, an' it's paid for. Heave 'er in!"

And the negroes, thus encouraged, piled the furnaces with the inflammable stuff, heedless of their peril.

The pilot shoved the boat into the current, to take every advantage, even though logs and drift jammed against the paddles and threatened to wreck it.

Above, the captain walked, watching every inch gained or lost; and near him stood the Crescent City Sport, his eyes glittering with excitement.

"We're gaining, once more!" he declared, feeling like taking his shiny hat and tossing it high in the air, as the sensations of the victor thrilled his veins. "If we can hold

on this way for another mile, we'll put those fellows behind us, and then show them a clean pair of heels all the way to New Orleans. Eh, captain?"

"Ay, that we will!" the captain cried, kindling anew at the thought. "We'll stay with 'em, and we'll lead 'em, if the boat holds together. This thing's got to be settled. Six times have we raced in this way. The Princess is better than the River Queen or she hain't! I'm banking on the River Queen, and I'm going to prove to the world and to her owners that she's the fastest boat!"

It was plain enough that the captain of the River Queen had lost his head; but, in that respect, he was representative of every one on the boat. Passengers and crew, under the influence of excitement, were little better than maniacs, so far as responsibility was concerned. Forgetful of personal peril, they were alike forgetful of the duty owed to the owners of the vessel, and to the ship-pers who had intrusted goods to its keeping. Captain and crew were criminally derelict.

Yards were rapidly multiplied into rods, and the race seemed to belong to the River Queen. Still the furnaces devoured the bacon with teeth of fire and flame, the engines racked, and the steam-pressure crept slowly higher and higher.

Then the River Queen became a torch and a bomb. The imprisoned steam broke all bounds. The vibrant shocks became a dull roar that swelled into a thunderous crash. There was a tempest of raining steam and flying splinters, for the boilers of the River Queen, exploding as if they were shell from a mortar, turned the night into day, and strewed the river with death and ruin.

It was a fearful scene!

CHAPTER II.

BREASTING THE CURRENT.

At the instant of the explosion, the young sport was standing near one of the paddle-boxes, looking off at the Princess.

He felt the deck rise beneath him, heard the crushing roar of the rending boilers, and then he seem to fly high into the air.

He was only half-conscious through all this, for the shock or the uplift partially deprived him of his senses; but he was well aware of his surroundings and his peril, when he dropped into the water.

Down he went, down, down! until it seemed to him his descent would never cease; and it really began to appear that he was to drop further toward the center of the earth than he had risen above it.

He knew everything, and even wondered as to the fate of those who had been his comrades; then, while his lungs were on the point of bursting, he was conscious that he was rising toward the surface.

He threw out his hands and struggled to assist in this upward movement; and, when it seemed to him he could not possibly stand it an instant longer, his head popped out of the water, and he drew in a great quantity of air—sucking it in as one dying of thirst might draw in water.

Expressing the water from his eyes, and sustaining himself by the beat of his hands, he looked about.

He had drifted already far below the scene of the explosion, though he was not aware of it, for all about him were dreadful evidences of the wreck of the steamboat.

Cries for help rung over the water; men paddled here and there in boats from the Princess—so quickly had the Princess been brought to and boats lowered; and bits of wreckage and masses of driftwood floated along, borne by the self-same current that was carrying him.

The lurid glare had died out of the sky, for the River Queen was no more, and the furnaces and funnels of the Princess no longer sent out their fiery glow.

But lights gleamed in the boats, and a lightwood torch, swung in a huge iron basket from an iron crane in the forward part of the Princess, illuminated the scene.

The Crescent City Sport, dragged downward by his heavy clothing, turned slowly toward the nearest boat and commenced to swim.

His hat was gone, and he kicked off his boots, after a little, because they so hampered his movements.

He was making fair progress, but was not calling for aid, knowing there were others who needed assistance much worse.

Then he was almost paralyzed by a cry that seemed to rise from the river only a few yards away. He knew the outcry, which was heart piercing, was made by the daughter of Jackson Mayport!

The young sport had been thrown more or less in the company of Miss Mayport, during the run from St. Louis, and had not only admired her beauty, but had been deeply impressed by her many charms.

Perhaps he would have denied being in love with her; but, when that cry reached him, a thrill, such as no personal peril could have evoked, awoke every fiber of his being—awoke them only to stamp them with a temporary paralysis that was agonizing.

It passed away as quickly as it came, but the sport swam in the direction of the outcry, calling encouragingly, yet he was not destined to reach the hapless girl and render her the desired assistance. A mass of drift smote him on the side of the head, crowded him under the water, and swept him away to seeming death.

How he survived the effects of the blow he never clearly understood, himself.

When consciousness returned, he found himself lying partially on the mass of drift and upheld by it. The river boiled and churned about him, but it did not move him onward, and nowhere were there any indications of human life or the presence of boats.

He roused himself and drew up on the drift. It shook and appeared on the point of moving down the channel. Then he discovered that the drift had lodged on a muddy island and had stuck there.

From the position of the stars and the moon, he knew, after an instant's thought, that but a short time had elapsed since the explosion. His double-cased watch, which was still running, revealed the same fact.

He recalled the scream of the young woman whom he had tried to reach and aid. Was she dead? He shuddered at the suggestion and refused to harbor it.

Then, as his strength increased, he got off the shaky mass of drift and examined the island on which he had been cast, to find that it was only a mud-bank, rising like a whale's back above the surface and only a few yards in extent. Yet it gave him life and hope.

When he had entertained this much, he sent his voice in a loud call over the water.

No answering shout came back, and a chilling sensation of increased terror disturbed him.

Although hatless and shoeless, he was not suffering from the cold, for the Southern night was warm and pleasant.

Nevertheless, though his life had been so far spared, his position was most undesirable. On that cheerless mud-bank, with the great river boiling around him, and no sight or sound of life, he could hardly have been worse situated.

He did not despair, though, and his thoughts turned more to his fellow-passengers of the River Queen than to himself.

What had become of them? How many were dead or dying? How many had gone down never to rise again? And was Miss Mayport one of the unfortunates?

Ever his reflections clung to Miss Mayport, for that call for help, heard by him before he was struck by the drift, rung ceaselessly in his ears.

Had that call been heard by others, and responded to in time?

These were vain questions, but he continued to ask them of himself, and to trouble himself with dizzying fears, as he walked about the small circle of his mud prison.

The moon shone with mid-summer brilliancy, casting a flood of light over the dark Mississippi, yet the light was not powerful enough to reveal the forms of the trees on the shores of the stream.

No doubt those shores were far away; too far away to be reached by any but the most expert and powerful of swimmers.

There seemed nothing to do but to crouch on the drift, or in the mud, and wait the slow coming of the day.

To make his situation more comfortable, he drew up some of the small logs and arranged them for a seat, so that he was lifted out of the mud.

Having accomplished this, he looked again over the moonlit water, and beheld a sight that caused him to start and cry out.

A log was coming down the stream, to which a human being was clinging. More! The young sport was sure that human being was Fannie Mayport, the planter's daughter!

He saw that the current would whirl the log close to the mud island, and resolved to reach and rescue the girl.

He lifted his voice in an encouraging shout; and then, heedless of the peril to himself, plunged into the stream and swam toward the log.

He was surprised and alarmed when there came no answering cry, nor any movement to show that his call was heard.

The girl was evidently unconscious, and he feared that, at any moment, she might slip from the log and vanish.

The current was so swift that all his strength was needed, and if he had not been a good swimmer he could not have accomplished anything. By great exertion, however, he gained the log, and then shoved and urged it slowly toward the island.

This was an easier task than had been the swim up the stream to the log.

One thing astonished him beyond measure. Miss Fannie Mayport was not only unconscious—a thing to be expected—but she was tied to the log with a piece of rope, in such a way that she could not slip off into the water.

Having discovered this, and wondered at it, he directed the log steadily toward the island, until it bumped against the mud shore.

Then he scrambled from the stream, got out his knife, and cut the rope that held her to the log.

She was, to all seeming, dead!

CHAPTER III.

HUMAN FLOTSAM.

THOUGHTS he would not have dared to breathe aloud came into the mind of the Crescent City Sport, when he beheld this human flotsam floating toward him on the current of the great river. "Flotsam" was the word that entered his mind, and seemed appropriate.

Would she not belong to him, by right, if he rescued her? That was the question that came.

But why should he, the sport, think of the daughter of the redoubtable southern colonel as a possible sweetheart or wife? If he loved her, it must be as the child loves the star that is so far above its grasp!

He knew that Colonel Jackson Mayport might play cards with him, but would never, even in thought, associate him with his daughter, much less permit him to marry her.

"Yet, why am I so much worse than Jackson Mayport?" he wailed. "He plays for fun, and I play for money! Where is the difference?"

Then, he bitterly realized that his calling hung like a millstone about his neck, preventing him from rising to any honorable career or worthy ambition.

Having rescued her from the immediate danger of drowning, the sport set about the task of her restoration.

Placing her on the logs he had drawn up on the mud, he began to chafe at her limp hands and wrists.

He could not fail to notice that, notwithstanding her pallor, she was wonderfully beautiful. Her beauty was of the southern type, with dark hair and eyes and slender form.

Then he did what he should not have done, and would not have done under other circumstances. He lifted her hands to his lips and passionately kissed them.

He felt that they two were alone, there, with only the white moon looking down on them. Another hour might see them both sunk forever beneath the rushing waters of the river. Therefore, he feverishly clasped the opportunity while it was near.

She stirred uneasily, whether because of the kiss or the friction of his hands he did not know. Still, it thrilled him with joy, for it told him that life was not extinct and

that she might speedily be restored to consciousness.

He returned to the task of bringing her back to life, and became so absorbed in it that he did not know any one else was on the island until a suppressed cough sounded behind him.

He leaped up as if a pistol had been fired over his head, and then saw a well-known character who had been a passenger on the River Queen.

"Why, Ganderfoot!" he gasped. "How did you get here?"

"Come by water!" was the reply.

No one could look at the man addressed as Ganderfoot without a smile. He was thin and lank, with a shrewd and expressive face, a "Billy-goat" beard, and deep, solemn eyes.

Now, as he stood staring at the Crescent City Sport and the girl who lay like a corpse on the logs, his thin lips opened widely and something like a smile came and went across his face. It was instantly supplanted by a glance of apology, for certainly this was no time for humor.

On the River Queen there had been no man more remarkably original than Gabe Ganderfoot, who, night after night had been the life of many a merry company. Not that he ever did or said anything through any intention, on his part, of being humorous. He would have denied any such intention; but whenever he opened his lips, or came into the company of others, there was some peculiar quality about him which caused them to smile.

"There's my boat," Ganderfoot continued, turning about and pointing to what seemed, in the uncertain light, a black box.

The young sport beheld it with as much surprise as he had beheld Ganderfoot; and well he might, for it was his own trunk, last seen by him on the River Queen!

"Purty good sort of a boat!" Ganderfoot avowed, surveying it critically. "No danger of its bu'stin' of its b'iler, either, and throwin' things all over the earth. Gracious! wasn't that a blow-up, though? Never seen anything like it in all my borned days!"

"I reckon it jist rained trunks and people, and beds an' clothin', an' so forth fer a full half-hour. I've heerd people say 'rainin' cats an' dawgs,' but this wus worse, a good deal!"

"I see you've got the gal I started out with?"

He brought up thus abruptly, and looked down at the unconscious young woman.

"Then it was you who tied her to that log."

"Yep! I rescued her, as yer may say, and was a-towin' her and the log, when another log bu'sted me in the shoulder and I let go; and—and— Well, we're here!"

"Say pardner, if you want to bring her round in the limited space of a double-gear'd jiffy, I calc'late you'd better open that there trunk an' git some o' the likker out of it! There's likker there, er my smeller's 'way off—good likker, too!"

This was a fact well known to the sport, but which he had forgotten.

Instantly his hands went into his pockets in search of the key to the trunk; and, when it was found, he hurriedly applied it to the water filled lock, and lifted the lid.

"I was swimmin' 'long, kind o' crazy like, after collidin' with the log, an' not at all certain that I'd ever git anywhere, 'ceptin' to the bottom, when that there trunk bobbed toward me over the water; and, seein' it was sich a swimmer, I laid holt and held on! And—hyer I am!"

The sport, who was wondering if Ganderfoot had been a witness of the stolen kiss, heard very little of this.

"Do you suppose many of the people on the River Queen were saved?" he queried, as he searched for the liquor. "As you say, it was an awful thing!"

"Dunno!" answered Ganderfoot, looking interestedly down into the trunk, where everything was marvelously dry. "I reckon some of 'em wus saved an' some of 'em wusn't. Anyway, hyer we air! I say, that would make a fine model fer the hold of a boat. Didn't leak hardly a drop, did she?"

"One of the best trunks ever built!" declared the sport, as his fingers closed on the bottle and he drew it forth.

"Yep, I should say so! I reckon, now,

none of them there clothes wouldn't fit me. I'm as wet as a drowned rat! An' all three of us is as wet as three drowned rats!"

The sport did not stop to hear this, but returned to his task of restoring Fanny Mayport to consciousness.

CHAPTER IV.

SNATCHED AT BY THE FLOOD.

GABE GANDERFOOT assisted in this work of restoration, at intervals, though most of his assistance took the form of advice and suggestions.

He was plainly uneasy about something, and splashed from one end of the little island to the other, and peered over the water in manifest anxiety.

The effect of the fiery liquor was all that could have been desired. The ashy pallor in the cheeks of the girl gave way to the hue of life; and after a time she opened her eyes and tried to rise to a sitting posture.

The young sport was at her side and assisted her.

Neither spoke for a minute; then she asked for her father, and sunk down crying and covered her face with her hands.

Her situation was most distressing, aside from her anxiety concerning her father; but she collected herself, after a time, and made further inquiries—the sport telling her of how they came to be there on that mud island, and of the various things of which he had knowledge.

As there was nothing in the trunk she could use, he purposely abstained from assuming dryer and cleaner garments—nor had he turned anything over for Ganderfoot, though that individual had strongly hinted his wishes.

However, the trunk had been drawn up to the center of the mud-bank, and, as its surface was now the driest and most pleasant place there, the sport and Ganderfoot assisted the girl to it.

Perched on the lid of the trunk she was out of the mud, though her situation was still anything but comfortable. However, she realized that the best possible had been done for her comfort, and was duly grateful.

The night, now, was fast waning, and the moon was low down in the West. The sport's watch showed that the dawn was not far away.

Ganderfoot had continued his restless walk to and fro over the island.

Now he stood before the sport and the girl, and, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, drawled:

"I hate to say it, and I hate to believe it, but I tell you what, if this durned creek hain't still a-risin' you may call me a goslin' instead of a gander! It's been creepin' up and creepin' up since we struck it, I guess; an' I'm no prophet if the water don't go over the whole business in another hour!"

This was startling information, yet a minute's examination was enough to show that Ganderfoot spoke correctly.

The water was climbing slowly up the banks of the flat mud island. A number of bushes that the sport had observed on landing were now submerged, and others were in process of being covered. Only a half dozen steps were now required to take one across the island at its widest part.

A spasm of fear convulsed the heart of Fannie Mayport, when this unpleasant fact was made plain to her. Was it not enough to be deprived of her father and of friends by that awful explosion?

The sport was fully alive to the peril that now threatened, but strove by sophistical reasoning to allay the girl's alarm.

"Surely," he said, in conclusion, "as soon as daylight comes we'll be seen and rescued; and the water is not rising so fast but that daylight will come before it covers the island."

None talked of swimming to the distant shores. The shores were invisible, and might be as invisible in the daytime;—might even be submerged and blotted out of existence until the subsidence of the flood.

However, the sport spoke of the possibility of using the logs and drift as a raft, and tried to grow enthusiastic over a thing which he feared was impossible.

The water rose higher and higher—rose so slowly that the rise was almost imperceptible, yet arose with cruel steadiness.

Ganderfoot continued to step gingerly from one point to another of the circumscribed area, pausing now and then to deliver himself of an observation or suggestion, or to shade his eyes and peer out through the breaking dawn in search of the hoped-for boat.

"If I was reely and shore-enough a ganderfoot, stiddy bein' it only in name, I wouldn't be a-worryin' so dreadful! But I'm out in the middle o' the ocean, as you may say, an' can't hardly swim, 'thout I've got a log to help me! Might as well been killed by the bu'stin' o' them b'ilers, so I might!"

Something of this kind he repeated; at fifteen minutes' intervals, until the day shone broadly, and the surface of the river came into view, underneath the lifting mists.

Eagerly every eye was strained.

"Perhaps if we'll all shout together," the sport suggested, when it was clear that no boat was drawing near, or was anywhere in view on the river's expanse.

And forthwith the suggestion was acted on, and the combined call for help went ringing over the tumbling waste.

Again and again they lifted their voices in unison, but no answering shout came back to fill them with hope and confidence.

Higher the water crept, until it dashed across the muddy reach and lapped suggestively around the trunk upon which all had climbed.

Then the raft of logs, on which they began to fix their thoughts in a sort of desperation, crumbled to pieces and swung off in the stream!

There had been no ropes of sufficient length and strength to bind and hold it there.

A little cry of fear fell from the lips of the girl.

And she was fully justified; for, in addition to the crumbling away of the raft, the trunk was swayed, at the same moment, by a current wave, that swept the little island from end to end.

It was clear to all that they could not hope to remain there longer. They must either make up their minds to meet death without a struggle, or try to strike out for the unseen shore.

The sport would have risked this without hesitation, but for the presence of Fannie Mayport. He knew he could not assist and support her through so long a swim.

Yet he was resolved to remain at her side, whatever might be the result.

At this critical moment, when hope seemed lost, Ganderfoot, who had never ceased to strain his eyes over the water, leaped to his feet on top of the trunk and stared excitedly.

"Who-ee!" he yelled, waving his hat and dancing up and down in much excitement. "There's some kind of a craft a-comin' this way!"

The others were electrified by this information. It was almost too good for belief.

To assure herself there could be no mistake, Fannie Mayport arose to a standing position, and then tip-toed, that she might behold the boat whose coming meant so much.

The Crescent City Sport stood at her side, staring in the same direction, and together they saw Ganderfoot was not mistaken.

A boat that seemed very small and frail, but which was really quite large, was dancing over the water in their direction. There were two men in it, one pulling at the oars and the other steering. Occasionally a big white-cap intervened, and hid the boat from sight.

Fearing he and his companions were not seen, Ganderfoot swung his hat and shouted at the top of his voice. He was joined in his shouts by the others.

Another big wave shook the trunk on its insecure foundation, and seemed about to hurl it into the river. The mud island was now almost covered.

"It's a nigger a-pullin'!" said Ganderfoot. "See him bend to the oars!"

Whether white or black, the oarsman was strong and skillful, and the boat was coming rapidly forward.

In another minute both of its occupants could be clearly seen. One was a white man and the other a negro.

Something resembling a frown rested on the face of the sport, as the boat drew near.

"The white man is Jepley Hill!"

Jepley Hill had been a passenger on the River Queen. He was Fannie Mayport's cousin, and a prime favorite with Colonel Jackson Mayport. He was likewise supposed by the sport to be in love with the girl, and an aspirant for her hand in marriage; hence the frown on his fine face.

Fannie waved her hand encouragingly to the men in the boat, and the negro tugged at the oars as if his own life was at stake.

He was one of Mayport's slaves, and believed that there was no white lady in the land quite so handsome or quite so much of an angel as Miss Fannie. He was called Richmond; and if he had any other name it seemed to have been forgotten.

Jepley Hill deftly guided the boat to the mud island, and ranged it close beside the trunk. Its prow struck the mud, and, as its motion ceased, Jep Hill leaped to his feet, lifted his hat, and extended his hand for the purpose of assisting his fair cousin.

The assistance was promptly accepted; and Fannie Mayport was soon in the boat.

"Just in time!" Hill cried. "The old river is still coming up! You couldn't have staid here much longer!"

He looked dubiously at the trunk.

"I guess we can take that, if it isn't too heavy! How did you get it here?"

This called for mutual explanations, during which Hill was made familiar with the facts known to the reader.

In answer to Miss Mayport's anxious inquiries, Hill told of his own rescue and of the rescue of Colonel Mayport, together with the saving of many others of the passengers of the ill-fated River Queen.

But many had gone to their death.

He told, also, how the river was being searched far and near by boatmen, and how he and Richmond had been out through all the hours of the early morning, and sighted these three on the mud island by the merest chance.

The negro sprung out and assisted Ganderfoot and the sport in depositing the trunk in the middle of the large rowboat.

Then Ganderfoot climbed gingerly in, followed by young Scales.

A second pair of oars in the boat, which Jepley Hill had not cared to use, were taken up by the sport, who was an expert oarsman; and the long pull for the shore was begun.

As they turned from the island, a big shore "lift" swept it from end to end, burying it from view.

"See that?" said Ganderfoot. "We couldn't never have stood up ag'inst that!"

CHAPTER V.

BLACK-BROWED HATE.

"I WONDER if he wishes I had let her drown?"

This somewhat unnecessary question was mentally asked of himself by the young Crescent City Sport.

The person designated as "he" was Jepley Hill.

Three or four days had elapsed since the wreck of the River Queen and the events that immediately succeeded it.

The Crescent City Sport was now at the home of Colonel Jackson Mayport; which was situated on some high bluffs above the reach of the water, though not far from the river.

The days had been busy ones, what with the rescuing of people residing in the lowlands and the searching for bodies of the victims of the steamboat disaster.

They had, besides, had their pleasant and their unpleasant features for Winthrop Scales.

It had been very pleasant to sit or walk at the side of pretty Fannie Mayport and listen to the music of her voice; and it had been decidedly unpleasant to meet the frowns of Jepley Hill, and feel that Hill held him in contempt.

It was quite plain to him that Hill was cherishing a gnawing jealousy. Hill had not been the same man, in his demeanor, since the rescue of the party from the perils of the mud island. He had sneered at and

snubbed the sport on more than one occasion, and to such an extent that the sport, who owned somewhat of a fiery temper, had with difficulty restrained his hands.

And now the sport, walking near the river's margin, in the morning hours, stopped suddenly, stared off over the water, and asked himself the question quoted in the opening of this chapter.

It was a foolish question; yet, sometimes, the manner of Jepley Hill was such as to have led Scales to that conclusion.

"He wishes I had drowned!" Scales corrected, and then walked on, his mind filled with unpleasant thought. "But I'm alive—though I have him and Richmond to thank for it, I presume—and I intend to remain very much alive for a good while yet, if it's possible."

He knew, now, if he had never known it before, that he was in love with Fannie Mayport—madly, wildly in love with her. He knew, too, that the love thus cherished was an apparently hopeless one.

Colonel Jackson Mayport, Scales was quite sure, would never consent to the marriage of his daughter to a sport.

"I could quit the river, and I could quit gambling!" he mused. "I haven't been at it so very long but that I could easily break off. But that infernal cousin!"

The hateful face of Jepley Hill obtruded in his thought.

He was quite sure that Jepley Hill loved Fannie Mayport, but he was not quite sure—and here he tried to take hope—that Fannie Mayport returned this affection.

Walking on in this manner, the sport came unexpectedly face to face with the very man who was so occupying his mind.

The path was narrow at that point, and Jepley Hill planted himself squarely in the middle of it, clearly for the purpose of insulting Scales.

Scales could have stepped out of the path and gone by him, but, to his mind, that would be an exhibition of the white feather, such as he did not choose to make.

"Get out of the way!" he commanded, unable to suppress his defiant hate. "I'm willing to give half the road, but not the whole of it."

"You'll not give anything!" Jep Hill sneered. "You'll take what I give you. You're an interloper here, anyway. Why haven't you gone on to New Orleans? Why do you still continue to hang about the plantation, when you ought to see that no one wants you here?"

The other purpled, but managed to hold his temper in check.

"You mean that you don't want me here?"

"No one wants you here!"

"On what authority do you say that?" was hotly demanded.

"On the authority of Miss Fanny!" Hill brazenly declared.

"That's a lie!" came the retort, the words stinging like the blows of a whip.

Hill grew red, and then deathly pale, while his words seemed to strangle in his throat. For an instant it appeared he meant to leap on the young man, and the latter threw himself in readiness for defense.

But Jepley, even though half insane with anger, was still conscious of the fact that he was no match, in a mere physical contest, for the young athlete, as Scales evidently was.

Strangely enough, he had no weapon on his person; and, therefore, could only glare at his rival in impotent rage and hate.

"You will pay for that," he hissed. "I'll never rest under such an insult as that!"

"As you please," replied the sport. "I'm ready to pay for it whenever you are ready. Mention any time and place, and they will suit me!"

"Right here, then!" retorted Hill, his wrath increasing. "Right here, and with pistols! Just before sunset, this evening. No seconds nor anything. Let no one know of it."

"Yours to command in all things," was the sport's answer, as he bowed, in mock courtesy. "Pistols it is; and here just before sunset. It's a very good place. I suppose each brings his own weapon?"

The other nodded coldly.

"Then, having settled that much, if you'll let me pass, we'll drop our little dispute un-

til this evening, when we'll hope to settle it permanently!"

His tones were smooth and even, but icy; and, though his face was pale and his eyes shone, he seemed never more calm.

Jepley Hill obediently stepped out of the path and allowed the young man to continue on his way.

"We'll settle it! That is, I'll settle you!" and Hill menacingly shook his fist at the disappearing figure of the man he hated and feared. "I don't think I'll wait till sunset to do it, either!"

Then he swung about and walked off in the opposite direction.

Scarcely had his footsteps ceased to sound, when a bunch of scrub palmetto, not far distant, was agitated, and Gabe Ganderfoot stepped out into the light.

There was an odd look on the lank fellow's homely face.

"Goin' to fight, air they? I dunno as I like that! If they go at it in real earnest, I reckon I'll have to stick my finger in the pie!"

Then, when sure he was unobserved, he set off down the narrow path in the direction taken by the Crescent City Sport.

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR.

THIS encounter with Jepley Hill was a thing that the sport deeply regretted, as soon as he was sufficiently composed to think the matter over.

He saw the pitfall into which it might plunge him. Should he escape the bullet of his foe, and cut that foe down by a shot from his own pistol, would the deed not ruin him forever in the eyes of Fannie Mayport?

He was pretty certain she would never forgive him, should he thus slay the man, and he felt that this was true, even though she might not care anything for Hill.

At that time, dueling was a recognized practice throughout the South. By it men settled their disputes, and punishment for murder committed in that manner was never thought of. Still, Winthrop Scales was sure that Fannie Mayport would never regard dueling as a manly way to dispose of an affair of this kind.

These thoughts so disturbed the sport that he avoided the house as much as possible during the remainder of the day, and shunned the society of all.

If he could have done it honorably, he would have retreated from the trouble into which he saw he was rushing.

As the afternoon advanced, he went up to the room that had been assigned him, and there penned a note to Fanny Mayport.

In it he told of the contemplated duel, in which there was a possibility that he might fall—in which it was almost certain one of the combatants would fall!—and, making this a pretext, he spoke of his deep love for her, of the hope he dared not cherish, and begged her to hold him in remembrance, even if she could do no more.

It was a rather chaotic thing, this letter, composed thus under the spell of great excitement and intense feeling; but he was pleased with it, when he read it over; and, then he put it in an envelope, addressed the envelope to Fannie Mayport, and placed it where it could not fail to be found in case of his death.

When this had been performed to his satisfaction, he went through his trunk and got out his best apparel.

It gave him pleasure to think that Miss Fannie had looked over some of these garments with him, after reaching the plantation; and had directed the servants who took charge of them, how to press them and relieve them of their creases and the dampness they had gathered.

A good, high hat had been in the trunk to replace the one lost in the river, likewise a pair of serviceable shoes; so that he was well supplied, so far as clothing went.

He clothed himself in the best the trunk afforded; and, when the time appointed for the duel approached, he dropped his pistol into a pocket, let himself out of the house without being observed, and took his way through the orange grove, back of the house, toward the river and the familiar path.

His pulses were rising and his brain

seemed on fire. How he longed to escape the dreadful thing; yet felt he could not, in honor!

No, he must go through it; and either shoot to kill, or waste his bullet by a purposeless shot in the air and permit the pistol of his adversary to cut him down.

When he reached the appointed place Jep Hill was not there!

Nothing could be more nerve-trying and tedious than a wait, under such circumstances.

The sport walked up and down the path, glancing now and then at his watch and at the swiftly-descending sun.

The sun set, and still Jepley Hill remained away.

This was so very puzzling that Scales walked further down the path by the river, wondering what it could mean. He was hardly able to bring himself to the belief that cowardice on Hill's part was the cause of it, though appearances set very much that way.

However, it was very clear that, for some reason or other, Jep Hill was not to meet him that evening, in a duel.

The sport continued on and on, until he was greeted by a surprise.

Unobserved, he came on several men, who were crouching near the water's edge and talking of himself and Hill.

They had just drawn Jep Hill's boat out of the water.

All of these men had been passengers on the River Queen, and one of them was an especial friend of Jep's. His name was Ward Lewis, and his countenance designated him as a scoundrel.

Not only were Ward Lewis and his companions discussing Jep Hill and Winthrop Scales, but they were closely scrutinizing some objects in the boat, that they had seemingly found there, and which were of a suspicious character.

One of these objects was a button, and another a knife.

The Crescent City Sport had barely time to acquaint himself with these facts, when he beheld Colonel Mayport drawing near, in company with the negro, Richmond.

It was evident Richmond had summoned him in haste from the house, or from some point on the plantation.

The sport did not wish to become an eavesdropper, but circumstances seemed forcing him into it. The tones used by the men in connection with his name were not friendly, and he saw it would not be the part of wisdom for him to advance and make his presence known.

A thick growth of scrub oak hid him from the men by the river; also from Mayport and the negro.

He could have beaten a retreat, it is true, but he fancied he ought to hear what was being said.

"There can't be any doubt he has been killed!" Ward Lewis stated, in a confident and vicious manner, when Mayport stood at his side and looked with him into the boat. "You'll never see Jep Hill alive. That scoundrel has knifed him, and then pitched him into the river."

Lewis exhibited the knife and the button.

"Do you see these things? This is the knife of that sport, and this is a button from his coat. It's been pulled from the coat in a fight, I judge. No doubt Jep resisted all he could!"

Naturally Scales was staggered by these statements; and, when he saw the button, he involuntarily scanned his coat and found that one of the buttons was missing from it!

His knife, too, was gone!

Colonel Mayport was horrified.

"You see that blood down there in the boat, too, don't you?" Lewis continued. "That's Jep's blood, I'm sure!"

The sport couldn't see the blood thus pointed out; though he knew, from Mayport's manner, there was blood in the boat.

"Why do you think Winthrop Scales did this?" the colonel asked, unwilling at first to believe that so pleasant and amiable a man as the sport was guilty of so foul a crime.

"I didn't see him do it, of course," Lewis admitted; "but I seen them go out in the boat together not over an hour ago."

"Then I seen the sport come back in this boat alone and leave it here; and, when I stepped over to see what it all meant, I

found things just as I have showed them to you. The sport was pretty badly excited and went toward the house. I reckon he was so worked up over what he had done that he didn't know he'd left these tell-tale things!"

It was an audacious and plausible lie, glibly told.

Winthrop Scales, in the shelter of his concealment, trembled as he heard it.

His first impulse was to rush out and denounce the liar and smite him to the earth with his clinched fist; but a due caution held him back from this, and caused him to hesitate.

He could not help wondering what the falsehood meant. Why had Jep Hill failed to appear at the appointed time and place? and why was Ward Lewis rehearsing such a lie to Colonel Mayport?

The only answer seemed to be this: Jepsey Hill hoped to brand him as a murderer and bring about his death—and then reap-pear and explain things away by a narration of further lies.

In that way Hill's rival and enemy would be disposed of without personal peril, and the way left open to him to seek boldly the hand of his cousin in marriage.

No one but a desperate and despicable villain would have thought of pursuing such a course!

There was a possibility, though—even a probability—that this theory, formed so quickly by the sport, was erroneous in every essential.

There could be no doubt, however, that Ward Lewis had told a deliberate lie; and Scales knew full well that Lewis was the especial friend and confederate of Jepsey Hill in all things.

"If Winthrop Scales did that, he must be arrested and punished for it!" the colonel exclaimed.

He was inexpressibly shocked and grieved.

"He must be hung!" cried Lewis. "And me and the boys here will see to it in short order, you bet! If we can only lay our hands on him, that's all we'll ask! We'll not allow him to get off this plantation. Once he reaches New Orleans and his case in the courts there, with a lot of sharp lawyers to defend him, he'll go free! It's always the way!"

Evidently Mayport assented to these assertions.

Lewis's fiery statements were also having a perceptible effect on Richmond, the negro; and it was quite apparent that it would not be difficult to arouse the wrath of the plantation darkies against the supposed slayer of Jepsey Hill.

Every moment the sport's peril was made greater.

He felt that he must advance or retreat; and he chose the latter course, and backed from the screen of bushes.

CHAPTER VII.

A LOVE THAT WOULD NOT BE SUPPRESSED.

THE dusk of the coming night was already about Winthrop Scales, when he left the shelter of the scrubby oaks and turned back along the pathway that led to the house; and before he reached the house, darkness had fallen.

He thought much and rapidly, during that walk to the house.

To his mind there was nothing plainer than that his life would be sacrificed if he remained on the plantation or allowed himself to fall into the hands of Ward Lewis and those other followers of Jepsey Hill.

Lewis's words and manner showed that he intended to arouse the negroes and set them to searching for the alleged murderer; and the sport was sure that no words of his would avail if once he fell into the power of the excited slaves.

No, there was nothing left for the sport but to leave the plantation with all speed and seek temporary shelter in New Orleans, and trust to time and the power of truth to relieve his name from the stigma now resting upon it!

Thus the sport looked at the dilemma in which he was placed, and thus were his actions guided.

But there was one determination that grew in his breast with a constantly-increasing power:

He would see and speak with Fannie Mayport before he departed, and assure her in the most solemn manner that the charges thus brought against him were false in every particular.

He was sure that if he told this in an earnest and truthful fashion she could not fail to be convinced.

At any rate, he could not hasten from the plantation without performing this act, for that would be to confess to her a guilt from which he shrunk in his inmost soul.

He would also leave a note or word for Colonel Mayport, having the same tenor.

Lights gleamed in the spacious rooms, as the sport hurried forward through the orange grove, that stood back of the residence and between it and the river.

Letting himself in by the rear door, he went straight to his own room, where he hastily penciled a note to Colonel Mayport which he deposited in the place where the note to Fannie, written earlier, had been left.

This latter note concerning the anticipated duel, he destroyed.

Taking a few articles from his trunk, he folded them into a bundle, and left the room, hastening from the house out into the grove.

He left the bundle in the grove, and then came back toward the house, resolved this time to see Fannie Mayport and deliver to her the message that burned on his lips.

But his steps were arrested by the angry voice of Colonel Jackson Mayport, who was relating to a horrified crowd what had been discovered on the bank of the river.

Colonel Mayport had been easily won to the belief desired by Ward Lewis.

And indeed, there was enough in the story told by Lewis and in the articles exhibited as found, to convince the most skeptical.

And now the colonel's fiery southern blood was up and he was as eager as any to compass the death of the supposed murderer.

If there had ever been any doubt in the mind of Winthrop Scales of the wisdom of making the retreat he contemplated it was dissipated by Mayport's words and attitude.

"We'll find him and we'll hang him to the nearest tree!" Mayport vociferated, with marked emphasis. "He can't get away from us. To think that I've been harboring a scoundrel!"

The sport shivered as he heard these ominous words. They meant, without doubt, his death, if taken.

"It's catching before hanging!" he muttered, holding his weapon in his hand ready for use, though the hand was in a pocket.

Still he did not move away, for he was determined to speak to Fannie Mayport before leaving the place.

"Arrangements are already being made to drag the river in the vicinity of the place where the murder is thought to have been done!" the colonel went on, still dilating on the atrocious crime which he believed to have been committed. "I haven't much hope, though, that the body can be found."

Then he turned, questioningly, on one of his hearers.

"Has Scales been seen in his room to-day?"

The query was directed to a colored woman, who served as chambermaid.

"Yes, sir," came the reply. "I see'd him in there two or free times—bofe dis mornin' an' dis afternoon!"

Thereupon the colonel immediately ordered her to take a light and look the room over to ascertain if any of the sport's personal belongings were missing.

She hurried away obediently, and again the colonel resumed the interrupted stream of denunciation and recital.

His mood was growing every moment more bitter.

Then the sport, from his place of concealment, saw Fannie Mayport join the circle of listeners about the planter, and listen, with bated breath, white cheeks and trembling form, to the reiteration of the things already told more than once.

Her appearance was of a character to give renewed courage to the sport, and her words were even more so.

"I don't believe it!" she declared, drawing herself up in much earnestness. "Mr. Scales is not the kind of man to commit a foul murder!"

"Go to your room, Fannie!" Mayport ordered, irritated by her words and manner. "You don't know what you're talking about. Go to your room at once, and don't let me hear another word like that!"

Colonel Jackson Mayport could be one of the most wrong-headed men on occasion, and this seemed to be one of the occasions when he was resolved to show the worst side of his character.

His daughter recoiled and gave him a pleading look; but, when she saw how earnest he was, she turned about and left the crowd.

The sport was cut to the quick by her grieved and dejected air, albeit he was more than pleased by her prompt declaration in his favor.

His heart was thrilled, also, by another sensation. He had read a story of love in the speaking face of the planter's daughter! It had been revealed in the tones of her voice, too, when she spoke so promptly in his behalf.

He had seen, he felt, that Fannie Mayport loved him; and for that knowledge he would have risked death in its most horrible form.

And, if she loved him, the greater was the reason why he should not depart from the plantation without assuring her, with his own lips, that he was not the guilty creature circumstances and evil men were conspiring to prove him.

He stood quite still and saw her walk away, re-enter the house, and mount to the upper balcony.

There he noticed that she paused and looked off toward the river.

"Of what is she thinking?" he inwardly questioned.

A large-live oak rose near the corner of the house, but a short distance from where she stood, and a long arm of this oak spread its leafy shelter over the roof. To the trunk of the live oak bits of plank had been nailed, and above, in its branches, there was a cosy nest of a place prepared, where the residents of the house frequently passed a quiet afternoon in reading.

Scales had more than once seen Fanny Mayport ensconced in this nest, and now, as he looked up at the balcony and at the oak, a suggestion came to him on which he instantly acted.

He walked to the foot of the oak, unobserved, and climbed up the rude ladder to the bough that brushed the corner of the balcony.

From this bough he dropped upon the balcony, and stood face to face with Fanny Mayport.

Naturally she was much startled by this sudden appearance of a man whom she had been led to think far away and a fugitive.

Yet, knowing how he had ascended to that place, she did not cry out and warn those below of his presence.

The moonlight, sifting through the branches of the oak, revealed and half concealed her beauty and added to her loveliness. A fairer woman the sport was sure he had never seen.

Though she was startled, she remained quiet, while he opened his lips in explanation. He spoke, though only in whispers.

"You do not believe what you heard down here, I am sure!" he declared. "I came up here to tell you it is not true—to swear to you that I am innocent of the dreadful thing they charge against me! I have no knowledge of what has become of your cousin. He may be dead, as is reported, but, if slain as in the manner told, it was by other hands. I was not in the boat with him: I have not even seen him, since this forenoon!"

He spoke hurriedly, and with much earnestness, and saw that his words were not without effect. She had not believed him guilty, even when the information came from her father. She was more willing to think him innocent when the solemn assurance came in this manner.

He could see by the moonlight that her cheeks were suffused. Her manner was agitated.

"I was sure you could not be guilty of so foul a deed," she admitted. "I—I;—but you must leave here instantly. If you are discovered here you will be killed. Father is very angry!"

He drew a step nearer.

"I cannot go without saying one word

more!" rendered bold and even desperate by his situation. "I must tell you that I love you! Love you as I never loved any other woman;—that I have loved you since our first meeting on the boat!"

She drew back and put out her hands, though it was clear to him she was not offended.

"Please do not stay!" she urged. "It will mean your death and my ruin if you are seen here!"

"I will go, immediately!" he promised. "You heard my words—my declaration."

She seemed to shiver as she glanced down at the talking group below. Her father was not visible to her, but his fiery words rose quite plainly.

Then she straightened up, as if a firm resolve uplifted her.

"I heard you!" she whispered, coming close to Scales, and looking into his face with eyes that shone with excitement. "I heard your declaration of love; and I cannot permit you to go from here—go to your death, perhaps—without assuring you that I love you also, as well as believe you innocent. Forgive me!"

"As if there was anything to forgive!" he whispered in ecstasy, clasping her to his heart. "I can face death now, if need be, without faltering!"

"You shall not face it!" she avowed, nestling against his bosom. "I can prevent it, and I will! I will poison the dogs! Now, go! Go, before it is too late! Before the dogs have been set on your trail! They will follow you to the tree, and you cannot escape discovery."

The Crescent City Sport had not thought of the dogs, for the reason that he had seen them only once or twice, and had then given them no attention.

But now he remembered that the planter owned two trained bloodhounds, that were kept in a kennel near the garden fence. He had heard their barking at various times, so knew just where they were located.

He saw, too, how reckless he had been in mounting to the balcony. Reckless not only of his own personal welfare, but of the reputation of the planter's daughter. The keen-nosed hounds would trace him to the tree, and reveal the fact that he had climbed up there.

Still, as his own room was on the second floor, though at the opposite side of the house, he took courage, and began to think the matter not so serious.

"You are quite right!" he said. "We must not be seen here together. It would be ruinous. Do not try to kill the dogs. It will subject you, possibly, to suspicion. I think I can reach the river; and, after that—well, dogs cannot trail on the water! Now, I must go. Good-by! We may never meet again! But remember always that I love you!"

He stooped to kiss her, and she gave him her lips willingly; then he drew away, climbed gingerly back into the tree, and began a slow and cautious descent.

When he looked at her last, she was turning, about to leave the balcony.

The Crescent City Sport reached the ground without discovery.

The crowd that had listened to the colonel's fiery talk was dispersing. The colonel was not to be seen. In the corner room of the dwelling a number of men were talking of dragging the river, and of starting a hunt for the murderer, and seemed to be making preparations.

"It's catning before hanging!" was the sport's thought, as he stepped quietly toward the fence that separated the yard from the grove. "If you don't move quick, I'll give you the slip yet!"

Then, having reached the grove, he swung into a fast walk, and, with the things under his arm, headed in the direction of the river.

And constantly there came the distressing questions:

"What has become of Jep Hill? Is he really dead? Who could have murdered him?"

And to these questions there were no answers.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WRATHFUL PARENT.

FANNIE MAYPORT was filled with a desperate resolve, as she turned about on the

balcony and walked toward the corner that led to the stairway.

Before leaving the balcony, she halted for an instant to make sure that Winthrop Scales had succeeded in descending safely.

She was trembling like a leaf, for she expected to hear the outcry announcing Scales's discovery.

When a few moments had passed without anything of the kind, and the assurance grew that the sport had succeeded in getting away from the house, she hurried quietly down the stairs, and sought a room where she knew a small bottle of strychnine had been placed. It had been got for the purpose of poisoning rats.

There was some fresh meat in the pantry; which she secured and liberally "salted" with the strychnine from the bottle.

She shook violently, while she made these ominous preparations. She was in dreadful fear of discovery, for she knew how terrible was her father's wrath when anything occurred to arouse it.

She knew he would never forgive her for the thing she was contemplating, if it was once traced to her.

But a feeling that she must do something to save the threatened life of the man she loved, caused her to put aside every other consideration.

When the meat had been satisfactorily prepared, she crept from the house and out toward the kennel.

She heard one of the dogs bark and leap, shaking his chain.

In the corner room were the men whose voices had been caught by the sport. They were still hastening their preparations for dragging the river.

One of the men, as she could tell, was Hill's chief satellite, Ward Lewis.

But she did not tarry to make out what they were saying.

As she neared the kennel, her heart almost failed her.

She had never liked the bloodhounds, for she considered them cruel and vindictive brutes. More than once she had known them to tear and mangle in a manner that made her shudder.

Nevertheless, they had always fawned on her whenever she came near them, and to place that poisoned meat before them seemed almost like murder.

She was painfully aware that the moonlight revealed her with unpleasant distinctness, when she emerged from the shadow of the big oak; but it was not a time to retreat.

"Down, Tiger!" she commanded as the nearest hound began to leap and shake his chain. "Down, I say!"

The other hound, hearing her voice, made its appearance.

She shiveringly threw the meat before them.

But, before they could eat it, a loud voice rung out, ordering them into the kennel.

At the same moment, a rude hand clutched her shoulders and drew her backward, upturning her face to the moonlight.

The hand and the voice were that of her father!

She gasped and shivered and seemed about to sink down in a paroxysm of fright.

"What are you doing here?" the colonel demanded. "Why are you feeding the hounds at this time of night?"

His words were filled with suspicion.

"I—I—"

"Is that meat poisoned?" he interrupted, before she could say anything.

A guilty shudder shook her.

One of the hounds had thrust a nose out and was sniffing the meat.

"Back into the kennel!" Mayport commanded.

Then he released his daughter and again demanded of her:

"Is that meat poisoned?"

She did not reply.

He took up the pieces and examined them as well as he could by the uncertain light.

He saw the white powder, and his suspicion grew into almost a certainty.

He heard a cat mew, near-by—Fannie's favorite cat.

With a cruelty that was fairly fiendish, he called to the cat and tossed one of the bits of meat down in front of it.

"If it wouldn't hurt my dogs, it won't

hurt your cat!" he declared, with unfatherly fierceness.

Fannie trembled more violently than ever, and a chill as of death seemed to strike her heart.

She appeared on the point of leaping forward and snatching the meat from the cat, but she did not.

With hungry avidity the cat flew at the meat, growling in its angry way; and then began to chew and swallow the morsel.

Mayport clutched Fannie by the shoulder. "You shall stay here till this thing is settled. Till the cat tells us if that meat is poisoned. Why don't you speak, girl?"

Fannie was too nearly paralyzed to speak. She did not attempt a reply; and he glared into her face as if puzzled.

"I'll make you speak, when the time comes!" he growled. "The time was when you delighted in obeying your father. Now, you delight in—"

He closed his teeth with a click and failed to complete the sentence.

A good idea of the truth filled his mind. He was pretty sure Fannie cared a great deal, if she did not love, the man he believed a murderer and a fugitive.

The cat, after it had devoured the meat, and nosed about for more; but the colonel held up the other piece so that the cat could not get it.

And the hounds whined in the kennel, growing more and more uneasy under the restraint thus strangely imposed on them.

The strychnine was quick and deadly. The meat had been liberally sprinkled with it, and the cat soon showed symptoms of poisoning. She became uneasy, and tried to make off to obtain water.

The colonel detained the animal who, almost at once grew wild, then fell in a spasm, and soon died.

It was a terrible thing for the girl to be thus compelled to witness the agonies and death of her favorite.

But Fannie made no sign of the pain endured, or of the horror that held her in its embrace.

"It's as I thought!" exclaimed Mayport, his wrath changing to fury. "You came out here to poison the hounds, that that scoundrel might get away. You would favor the man who killed your cousin! It's damnable! Come with me!"

He drew her along with cruel grasp, heedless of the pain he caused.

She offered no resistance. She seemed petrified, or incapable of voluntary movement.

Dragging her fiercely to the house, he thrust her through the doorway, and then commanded her to walk to her room.

She obeyed without a word.

When they were alone in the room, with the door closed, he looked at her unrelentingly, and held up the meat that still remained.

"I ought to make you eat that!" he asserted, almost beside himself with rage.

"I can eat it!" was her defiant reply.

The moonlight shone on her features, which were waxy in their pallor. But the light that burned in her eyes was hot and tearless.

"I can eat it," she repeated, "at your command! Only say the word!"

"You are insane!" he cried, pushing her from him. "You are crazy!"

He stood glaring at her in impotent wrath.

"Now, tell me what you meant by that?"

"I intended to save an innocent man from your silly anger!" she avowed. "You meant to convict without trial, and hang without sentence of death being passed by any tribunal! You ought to thank me for trying to save you from so foul a crime!"

He looked at her as if he could hardly believe his ears.

Nevertheless, he queried:

"Why are you so interested? Have you given him your love unasked?"

"Not unasked!" she asserted.

His eyes kindled with new fire.

"Again I say you are crazy! And you'll stay in this room until I choose to let you out! A little imprisonment may bring you to yourself!"

He turned from her with scorn, closed the door bangingly, and locked it; then

she heard him command the chambermaid to keep the room locked until he said to open it.

His heavy steps rung through the hall, as he went toward the room where she had heard those men talking; and, in less than five minutes, she caught his words, as he called to the hounds.

He had released the dogs and was bringing them into the house.

They passed up the stairway, led by the colonel and followed by some men, and she knew the clothing of the sport was being exhibited to them, that they might smell it and so be able to track the one who had worn it.

Then the colonel and the men tramped down, and, shortly afterward, she caught the ominous baying that she knew so well, and which revealed to her that the trail in the orange grove had been discovered.

"Oh, God! watch over him and save him!" she prayed, slipping to the floor and lifting her hands appealingly. "Save him! save him!"

And then the outcries and exclamations of excitement and the booming notes of old Tiger told that the pursuit toward the river was begun.

Fortunately the trail had been found where the sport left the house for the last time, so that the hounds did not approach the live oak and reveal the fact that Scales had climbed to the balcony.

CHAPTER IX.

A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

THE deep baying of old Tiger was heard likewise by the Crescent City Sport, who had not yet been given time to reach the river at the point he desired.

He started, when he heard it; for it told him as plainly as words that his trail had been picked up and that the race for life had begun.

He knew he would be no match for those hounds. They were keen-nosed and they were reasonably fleet of foot. And worse, they were fierce and courageous, and could be depended on to fight, when ordered to do so.

But the sport did not lose hope, because of that. He drew himself more erect and pulled out his pistol. If a fight was to come he was ready.

He had a knife, too, which he felt of to see that it was in place and ready for use.

Then he quickened his pace and continued right on in the direction he had been pursuing.

He had told the girl not to poison the hounds; but he had half expected she would do it, anyway, judging by the manner in which the command was received. It seemed plain, now, that she had not made the attempt, or that it had failed.

His intention had been to seize the boat of Jep Hill and pull out over the water; but, when he reached the point where the boat was usually kept, it was gone.

The sport was much disappointed and disturbed by this. There was no other boat on the river, near there, so far as he was aware; and the predicament in which he was placed was most unpleasant and perilous.

There seemed nothing to do but to continue on down-stream; and this he did, with the baying of the bloodhounds sounding unpleasantly and drawing nearer.

There was no possible doubt that his trail was what they were following.

The Mississippi was still high, though it was not out of its banks. However, it seemed suicidal to think of plunging into it in an attempt to baffle the hounds by swimming, and it was almost suicidal to dream of trusting to a hastily-prepared raft.

Besides, the sport had nothing with which to make a raft. There were logs in plenty, but no ropes; and no time in which to cut vines and creepers, or manufacture rope out of the bark of trees.

When it was possible, he stepped into the water and waded along close to the bank for as great a distance as he could. But these distances were never of any considerable length, and he wondered if what was gained was really worth as much as the time lost.

The booming notes of old Tiger and the shrill yelping of the younger hound came

ever closer and closer; and then to the ears of the hunted man, came the crashing sounds made by horses breaking through underbrush; likewise the hammering of hoofs.

He could hear, too, the voice of Colonel Mayport exhorting the dogs to their best work, and an occasional exclamation from Ward Lewis and others among the pursuers.

Thus made aware that the hounds and the men were surely and rapidly gaining on him, in spite of his wading expedients, the Crescent City Sport abandoned the water and ran straight ahead, trying to make a gain by sheer speed.

At the same time, he kept close watch of the banks, in the hope of seeing some kind of boat.

He was a good runner, and soon drew away from the men, but the hounds seemed to gain, now that they were no longer bothered by his wading in the water.

The trail he left was hot and plain, and they followed it as unerringly and swiftly as if it were a traveled road; and in a very short time they were so near that the sport saw he could not escape by mere running.

"I'll have to dispose of those cursed hounds!" he gritted, fingering his knife and pistol. "I hate to try it, for they're ugly brutes; but I see I'll have to!"

He knew that in a combat of that kind there was a big chance that he might be so disabled he could not go on, and so would fall easily into the hands of his enemies.

Having reached the conclusion that he must fight the hounds, the sport kept as good watch as he could for some point that would favor him in the battle.

This was not an easy thing to do, because of the darkness; for, although there was bright moonlight, the path was extremely gloomy and shadowy where trees and bushes overlaid it.

Running on in this manner, he encountered a log, which he found rather difficult to mount.

It lay right in the path, and it gave him an encouraging idea.

He scrambled over it, and then dropped hastily down behind it.

Before he had fairly settled himself, he had out his knife and pistol, holding the pistol in his right hand and the knife in his left.

The dogs were not a hundred yards behind him, at the moment; but they could not see the log, nor the route at that point. They were following him entirely by the sense of smell.

Tiger was giving vent to his excitement in deep-toned notes, while the younger dog was whimpering and yelping almost in the same breath.

They were coming on like a pair of tornadoes, making the brush crack and the bushes rustle; and something that was akin to fear made the sport set his teeth hard and draw in his breath with a gasp.

These dogs were the largest and fiercest of their kind, and it seemed like tempting death to thus lie in their pathway.

Yet there was no other course for the sport to choose. If he continued to run from them he would exhaust his strength, and the time would quickly come when they would leap on him and drag him down.

He tried to still his quivering nerves, as he heard the dogs come nearer and nearer to the log, and to prepare himself for the inevitable combat.

He was glad that his human pursuers had fallen so far behind, that they could take no part in it.

The battle would be uncomplicated. It would be an armed man fighting for his life against a pair of bloodhounds.

He relied greatly on the pistol. If it did not fail him, he had no doubt of the result. If it failed him, the knife remained; and a knife was not a bad weapon in the hands of a desperate man.

Experienced as was the leading hound, it did not dream that its quarry had dropped behind the log on which its glaring eyes were now fixed. Not a dozen leaps separated it from the log, and, though it was trailing by the sense of smell alone, it did not fail to see the log that lay straight ahead of it.

A thunderous, booming sound came from its cavernous throat, just as the log was gain-

ed; and then its form was hurled high in the air, like that of a trained horse, leaping a high fence in a fox chase.

The Crescent City Sport saw the form of the dog rise above him like a black shadow; and, thrusting up the pistol, he fired, almost without taking aim.

A truer shot could not have been sent. A death-howl came from the lips of the old hound; and, when it struck the ground, it thrashed about in its death-agonies, instead of trying to attack the hunted man.

The other hound was directly at its heels, and was over the log and on the sport in almost the same instant. It did not lack courage, and was not to be driven from its purpose by the fate of its leader.

Scales struck at it with the knife, and, though the blades drew blood, the hound fixed his teeth in his left shoulder!

Again and again the knife gleamed in the moonlight, and so effective were the blows delivered by the young man that the hound's fangs inflicted but slight injuries.

When he saw he had given it its death-blow, he threw it from him, and, springing up, quietly put the knife back into his pocket, adjusted his disarranged clothing, and listened for the pursuing men.

The brush was cracking in the same manner as he had heard before, and the voice of Colonel Mayport sounded loudly.

"They are crowding me too closely for comfort," was the sport's nervous comment. "But they'll not catch me now with those dogs dead!"

Then he leaped away and continued his flight.

CHAPTER X.

CAST OUT ON THE WORLD.

FANNIE MAYPORT was in an almost hysterical condition, when her father locked the door of her room and turned away; and when, later, she heard the baying of the hounds, she sunk to her knees in prayer for the safety of her lover as has already been told.

Those booming notes of Tiger, the orders of her father, and the shouts of the company about him, struck terror to her inmost soul.

Colonel Mayport had seemingly overlooked the fact that the window of her room could be opened.

It was very likely, however, that the colonel had not thought it necessary to bar this window, as there was a sheer descent of fifteen or twenty feet from it to the ground, and the young woman was not likely to leap that distance, much as she might want to get out of her prison.

Fannie went to this window and lifted it, so that the sound of the pursuit came more distinctly to her.

A soft, warm wind came in, sweet with the odor of flowers, and suggestive of the coming summer that was now at hand.

The timbered lanes looked dark and forbidding, even under the moonlight; and over the tops of the orange trees she could see the shining surface of the great river.

By carefully listening to the baying of the hounds she was able to tell the exact course taken by the fleeing sport, and to judge from it something of his intentions.

She knew by the way he continued on down-stream that he could find no boat.

Fainter and fainter grew the baying of the hounds and the sounds of pursuit. Then came that distant shot; after which the booming notes of old Tiger and shriller yelps of the younger hound were heard no more.

She could not tell what this meant; but she shivered in dread. She knew it was possible that that shot might have brought death to the sport.

While she was thus alternating between hope and fear and half dead because of the intensity of her emotions, there came a light tap on the door of her room.

She turned quickly, and was startled and terrified to see that the door had been unlocked and pushed open.

However, she was somewhat reassured, when she perceived the homely and kindly face of Gabe Ganderfoot and heard his drawing tones.

"Your uncle ain't nothin' to be skeered at," he avowed, opening his mouth in a wide grin. "I jist thought I'd come and tell you not to be down-hearted. If there's

anything I can do for you, jist remember that Gabe Ganderfoot, of Indiany, is yours to command. If you want to go out of this room, you kin go out, this blessed minute! I've hired that there nigger wench to tie a hankcher over her eyes and stuff wax in her years an' to know nothin', fer a few minutes!"

"I am very grateful!" she said, "and I thank you ever so much! If I dared to leave this room I would. But that is something I dare not do! Father is terribly angry with me, now; and I must not make him angrier by anything of that kind!"

"Jist as you say!" said Ganderfoot, with owlsh solemnity. "Jist as you say; though I said to mese'f, 'if that gal wants to git out o' there, she shill!'"

He made an awkward and scraping bow. "An' allus remember that Gabe Ganderfoot is yours to command!"

He backed through the doorway and was about to retreat.

"Do you think he—he—Mr. Scales will get away?" she faltered.

Ganderfoot grinned again.

"I'm a-bettin' big money on that very thing!" was his comforting assurance.

"And you do not think he killed Mr. Hill?"

"Nary time! To tell you the truth, miss, I'm not shore that Jep Hill is dead, by a good 'eal! And which that is one of the things that I'm a-goin' to find out, in short meter! If Jep Hill hain't dead, then there hain't any kind o' use in chasin' the man that didn't kill him, with bloodhounds and the like!"

Having delivered himself of this bit of wisdom, Gabe Ganderfoot backed through the doorway; and she heard him go softly along the corridor and down the stairs.

There had been something so disinterested and kindly in the manner and words of this rude specimen of humanity that there actually were tears in the eyes of the girl, when he disappeared in that way.

Then she heard the unreliable chambermaid come back to the door and lock it.

These things gave her some food for thought, and served to temporarily distract her attention from matters that were so distressing.

She was sorely puzzled, though, by the cessation of the noise of the hounds, and could not long withdraw her mind from a contemplation of what it meant.

After a long time—how long she did not know—there were indications of the return of Colonel Mayport and his companions.

She could tell, before he drew near the house, that he was in an ungovernable rage. His voice was fairly passion-choked.

She trembled because of this, but rejoiced, also, for it apparently indicated that the chase after the fugitive had resulted in failure.

She wondered at the continued silence of the hounds, for they usually came back leaping and bounding—except when the chase had been of sufficient duration to thoroughly tire them out.

As the colonel came into the yard, something of the true state of affairs was made plain to her by his words; and, a minute later, she knew that the young man had killed the hounds and had got away.

She trembled, rejoicingly, when she knew this. Whatever else might come, the life of the man she loved, and who loved her, was still safe.

And her heart ascended in gratitude for this answer to her prayers.

The men filed into the grounds, and the negroes proceeded to put away the tired horses; then she heard her father's steps on the stairs.

She instinctively felt that he was coming to her room, and she shrunk from the scene she feared was to follow.

Although she had not succeeded in poisoning the dogs, they were dead, and his wrath would be unappeasable.

He tramped heavily on the stairway, and through the corridor, as if worn by his recent exertions.

She retreated toward the window, when the door creaked on its hinges. Though she knew she would not dare to leap down, no matter what occurred, the very fact that the window opened out on the world gave her some measure of courage.

The colonel's face was like a thundercloud,

as he strode into the room and stood face to face with his trembling daughter.

"I suppose you have heard the news and are pleased!" he began, in his most caustic manner.

His lank form dilated, his eyes burned, and his voice held an ominous, metallic click.

When she did not reply, he advanced a step nearer.

"What you tried to do has been done! The dogs are dead, and that scoundrel of a sport killed them!"

She wanted to tell him that she was very glad, but feared to do so.

"Now, I want to know," emphasizing every word by a movement of his forefinger, "what you meant by trying to help that man get away? Is he a lover of yours? Answer me that?"

He had closed the door behind him, so that his words did not penetrate into the other parts of the house.

"Is he a lover of yours?" he repeated, when she hesitated.

She was too truthful to lie, even though a lie might save her.

"He has told me that he loves me!" she declared, in as firm tones as she could summon.

The information stung the colonel into still greater fury.

"And he has dared to speak of love to you, and you have dared to listen to him! You, a Mayport! You, occupying the position you do!"

He glared at her, as if he meant to spring on her and tear her in pieces.

"You have encouraged him to talk of love?" he continued. "Why don't you speak, girl?"

"I did not encourage him!" she said, with an unexpected calmness.

"That is a lie, Fannie!" shaking his finger at her, once more. "A deliberate lie! You foolishly gave your heart to him unsought, and then let him see that you had fallen in love with him. I suspected as much, when you so quickly proclaimed his innocence before all those men in the yard, this evening. You carried your heart on your sleeve!"

She made no answer, though a sudden fear thrilled her. Had she been guilty of the thing accused? Had she worn her heart on her sleeve?

She felt sure, at any rate, that she had not done so when the sport was nigh. She had been sedulously careful in that respect.

"Do you not hear me?" and he stamped angrily, when she continued silent. "Do you not hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you!"

"And why do you not speak?"

"I could do nothing but deny, and that throws you into a rage!"

"You're a disobedient hussy!" he exclaimed, suddenly losing all control of himself. "You are no longer any daughter of mine! Leave this house, this instant! It is no longer your home! Go to that lover, if you want to; but never come back here!"

When that storm broke about her, she faltered and seemed about to sink fainting to the floor. Then she recovered, and was apparently on the point of prostrating herself at his feet and imploring him to withdraw his stern and cruel decree.

But her mood changed, instantly. She grew more icily calm; and, drawing herself to her full height, looked him in the face, with an unexampled calmness.

"Very well! I will go! I will obey you. I have always obeyed you, and I will do so now!"

A fit of insanity seemed to grasp him.

"Go!" he shrieked. "Go this minute. If you stay longer, I shall be tempted to throw you out of the window!"

He flung the door open and pointed to the corridor.

And she, gathering her skirts about her, passed him, with a hysterical cry, and fled down the stairs and out into the night.

CHAPTER XI.

DRIVEN BY FOLLY.

THE planter stamped the floor, as his daughter fled by him with that cry on her lips, and continued to point his finger until she passed from sight.

His eyes were bloodshot, a clammy dew rested on his forehead, his face was ashy and his lips frothed.

He was a living statue of a male fury.

Then, the world reeled before him, he spun quickly round, and sat down on the nearest chair to keep from falling headlong to the floor.

A moan fell from his frothy lips.

"She has broken my heart!" was his low cry. "She has broken my heart. Was ever such wickedness seen? To be thus defied and spurned by my own child! Oh, God! I can't stand it!"

He moaned and writhed in his agony, forgetful of the agony he had inflicted on his hapless daughter.

He was heard, as he thus sat clinging to the chair and muttering; and the chambermaid came hurrying toward him.

"Oh, de marster's done took a fit!" she vociferated, in a voice loud enough to be heard down-stairs. "Oh, my good Lawd! Oh, my good Lawd! What's to be done, now?"

She saw that Fannie had gone from the room, and leaped to the conclusion that Fannie had escaped and the colonel's desperate condition had been produced by a discovery of this fact.

Hence, she trembled for her own welfare as well as for that of the colonel, as she knelt at his side to restore him.

For the colonel had fallen forward on his face, at the moment of her entrance and seemed in a dying condition.

Other servants came leaping up-stairs, in answer to her cries; and Mayport was carried by them, to his own room, where a comfortable bed was made ready for him.

Then a negro was put on a fast horse and sent speeding out through the night for a doctor.

There was much speculation by Ward Lewis and his followers over the colonel's condition and its cause. The information had begun to spread that the daughter had fled to join the missing sport—which flight was presumed to have occasioned it all.

It was after midnight when the doctor arrived and was shown to Mayport's room. A hint of the supposed trouble had been given him by the negro messenger.

He found Mayport in better state than he had been led to anticipate. Mayport was not a raving maniac, or a weak and whimpering invalid. On the contrary, he was fierce and stern of mien and vindictive of spirit.

The doctor recoiled, as he stepped into the lighted room, so hotly were the eyes of the presumed sick man bent on him.

"You may go back the way you came!" announced Mayport, pointing to the door. "I didn't send for you, and I don't want you! I'm not sick; and if those fool niggers take it into their heads to perform another trick like this, it will be the worse for them!"

All who heard him stared and retreated, except the doctor, who stood his ground.

"You're a sick man, Colonel Mayport, and I'm here to treat you! You will let me make an examination, won't you?"

"Out of the room!" Mayport howled. "Out of the room! I don't want your pills and your physic, and I won't have it! You're an idiot! You're a—"

The remainder of the exclamation was drowned in a smothered burst of rage.

Before this cyclone, the doctor retreated, and shortly after, when he saw that his presence and his efforts to serve Mayport were productive of more evil than good, he left the house.

He was no sooner off the plantation than Colonel Mayport ordered one of the negroes to bring there a lawyer, whom he named; and this gave rise to the startling belief that the colonel was on his death-bed, and knew it, and wanted to make his will.

All these things greatly disturbed Ward Lewis and his brother satellites, who sat in the corner room, smoking their pipes and listening to the alarming stories of the servants.

The lawyer was summoned from a distant town, and did not arrive until the morning was well advanced.

In the mean time, to the astonishment of the colonel and the servants, also apparently to Ward Lewis and his companions, Jepsey Hill, the supposed murdered man, put in an appearance!

He came from the direction of the river.

His clothing was torn and stained with mud and river water. And his looks indicated that he had had a severe experience.

Colonel Mayport had been for hours in a desperate state, both mentally and physically. He believed he was at the point of death, and this belief was shared by those who were permitted to look into the room and see him.

His face was haggard and drawn; his eyes bloodshot and staring; his hands and limbs tremulous, as if smitten with shaking palsy.

He was weak, too; almost as weak as a child; and one of the servants was required to turn him in the bed.

Such was the result of the violent rage to which he had given way.

So greatly was Mayport agitated, when he heard that Hill was alive and in the house, that a dreadful shaking seized him.

The chambermaid, who was the bearer of the startling information and the only other person in the room at the time, was scared half out of her senses. She thought the colonel's last hour had come.

She was about to scream out for assistance, when the colonel controlled his quivering nerves and sternly ordered her to hold her tongue.

"Send Jep Hill up here!" he commanded. "Send him up here alone! Do you hear? I want to be sure you're not lying to me!"

Having received these instructions, the chambermaid fled from the room; and, shortly thereafter, Jep Hill entered it and closed the door after him.

"I'm alive, still, colonel, as you see!" he said, advancing to the bed. "But it's not through the mercy of Winthrop Scales. He tried hard enough to kill me. And more, I think it was through jealousy!"

Mayport sat up in bed and gathered the covers about him as if chilled, though the day was warm.

"I thought you dead!" he gurgled. "I thought you dead; and it's not the fault of the sport that you are not? Tell me about it!"

Jep Hill was very willing to do this; and sat down at the bedside and poured into the colonel's prejudiced ear a marvelous story.

According to this account, he and the sport had gone out in the boat, hunting, and the sport had killed an otter. It was the otter's blood that caused the bloody stain. And shortly after that, they had got into a quarrel; and the sport knocked him into the river with the rifle and then paddled away, leaving him to his fate.

Only for the double fact that he was not hurt so seriously as the sport thought and was a good swimmer, he would have gone to the bottom of the Mississippi and become food for fishes.

But he succeeded in making a landing at a point far below, to which the current carried him; and had there crawled out of the water, more dead than alive.

For hours he had lain unconscious; and then had worked his way, by tedious crawling and walking, back to the plantation.

Hardly had this remarkable tale been narrated by Jep Hill, when the lawyer was announced; and, at the command of Mayport, was shown into the room.

The temporarily-crazed planter welcomed the lawyer eagerly; and then, to the marvel of all—save perhaps Jep Hill—he had the lawyer draw a will, leaving the plantation and all his wealth to his "beloved nephew, Jepley Hill, the only relative who has not deserted me in this hour of my affliction!"

It was a remarkable document, certainly.

When it had been drawn and signed, and the lawyer had gone, and the colonel lay on his bed, tossing feverishly, Hill wended his way out of the house and toward the river.

And, as he stepped into the familiar river path, he rubbed his hands and muttered:

"If the old fool will only hurry up, now, and die before he has a chance to change that!"

CHAPTER XII.

GABE GANDERFOOT SPEAKS HIS MIND.

"HE'LL have a chance to change his opinion mighty quick, anyhow, if nothin'

else!" came in a grating tone, from beside the path, and the thin form of Gabe Ganderfoot rose at Hill's side.

Jep Hill was much startled, and tried to spring forward out of the way; but Ganderfoot's long arm was reached out, and Ganderfoot's muscular right hand took him by the coat-collar.

"What's the matter with you?" Hill snarled, though he was pale and shaky, and shrunk beneath the touch of Ganderfoot's fingers. "What do you mean by scaring me that way, and pulling my coat?"

"Ho, ho! Te, he, he!" Ganderfoot chuckled. "Swells up like a Tom-cat, tryin' to skeer me into lettin' him go!"

Then he addressed his words to Hill.

"You'll come along with me, young feller! I've had my eye on you fer a good many days, and now I want you!"

Jep Hill opened his mouth to call for help, and was then petrified into silence by the recollection that Ward Lewis and his other tools had left the plantation some time before, under instructions from him to push the hunt for the Crescent City Sport.

"No use yelpin' out!" and Ganderfoot's homely face showed a smile. "Not a mite o' use! Even the nigger, Richmond, has gone away. Howlin' won't help you."

"What are your intentions?" Hill questioned, when the hand was removed from his collar.

He wheeled about, as he said it, and quailed before the pistol that looked into his face.

"You'll go with me without foolishin', er you'll hear the bark of this purp, an' feel his bite! Now, walk along!"

"But what are your intentions?" Hill managed to repeat.

"That you'll know soon enough. Jist now, they're to make you walk in front of me, back to the house!"

Seeing that there was no escape from this humiliating experience, Jep Hill stepped along the path, in front of Gabe Ganderfoot, though he watched narrowly for a chance of escape or an opportunity to disarm or disable his enemy.

Two or three of the blacks saw Ganderfoot drive Hill thus before him into the house; and, though Hill begged them to leap on Ganderfoot and bear him down, the threatening pistol caused them to hesitate.

Into the house and up the stairway to the room of Colonel Mayport, Ganderfoot forced the unwilling scoundrel to go; and then through the doorway, into the room, and up to Mayport's bedside.

Mayport roused himself and stared.

"You see this scoundrel!" Ganderfoot exclaimed, waving the pistol. "I'm told you made a will in favor of him a little while ago; and I heard him sayin' he hoped you'd die before you could git a chance to change it!"

"It's a lie!" declared Jep Hill, stung to a reply in spite of the pistol.

"Be careful of your breaks, Jeppy!" Ganderfoot admonished, though without any show of passion. "A few like that might tempt me to hurt you!"

He reached back and pushed the door to with his foot, though the movement did not cause it to latch.

"I come up hyer to tell you that you've made your will in favor of a grand scoundrel; and that, in doin' as you've done you've showed yourself to be as grand a scoundrel, yourself!"

Mayport lifted himself in the bed, though he did not try to stop the speech of Ganderfoot. A strange, almost an unfathomable look, rested on his face. Perhaps he was beginning to see the nature of the wrong he had done.

"Any man that'll tumble his own daughter out into the night, as you done, Colonel Mayport—that will disown and cast off that which is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, in that way—is either too big a villain to live on the earth or is too crazy a man to be outside of a lunatic asylum! You hear me?"

"That's you, Colonel Mayport, and it gives me great pleasure to tell you jist what I think of you!"

Still Mayport did not hurl back a withering reply, as Jep Hill anticipated.

"And more!" the wrathful Indianian went on. "You disinherited your daughter and

give your property to this criminal—for he is a criminal—a man guilty of murder, and now under arrest by me, fer that crime!"

"It's a lie!" Hill cried again, with a shudder.

"A man that, through jealousy, planned to have an innocent man hung, as I can prove!"

"A lie!" Hill spluttered.

"You'll git that little speech down so 't you kin say it without stuttrin', Jeppy, if you'll jist keep on a little while!" Ganderfoot affirmed, holding Hill in place by the pointing pistol.

"A man that," turning again to the staring man on the bed, "pretended to be dead to throw me off the scent, as I believe, thinkin' to kill two birds with one stone; and that come back hyer, when he was told how things was goin', fer the express purpose of inducin' you to make that will in his favor!"

"It's a lie!" Jep shrieked, driven to fury.

"It's all a lie! Every word!"

"Good practice, Jeppy! Jist keep it up!"

He fixed his eyes on Mayport.

"If you don't believe these things now, colonel, the time's a-humpin' along when you will! I'm allus a-betlin' that Truth will win whenever she starts out fer to try! An' I calc'late that, in this case, she's started!"

For an instant, while speaking thus to Jackson Mayport, Gabe Ganderfoot was partially off his guard.

The keen and anxious eyes of Jep Hill noted it.

Hill had been mightily alarmed by that charge of murder. He had fairly trembled when the charge dropped from Ganderfoot's lips. It made him determined to escape.

When he observed, therefore, that Ganderfoot was paying more heed to Mayport than to anything else, he struck the pistol quickly from Ganderfoot's hand and leaped for the door.

Before Gabe could pick up the pistol, or do ought to stay the prisoner's flight, the latter was flying down the stairway, four steps at a time.

Ganderfoot snatched the weapon from the floor and ran to the head of the stairs, and bawled down for the servants to stop the fugitive.

However, this was one of the things Mayport's servants could not be expected to do, on such an order. They would be more likely to assist the pursued man.

Seeing that no attention was being paid to his command, and not able to get a view of the fugitive through the window, Ganderfoot ran down to the lower floor and out into the yard.

But, Jep Hill had already passed from sight, into the path that led toward the river, and was hastening along that shady way at his best gait.

"Thowed ag'in!" Ganderfoot snorted, in deep disgust. "It jist do beat all! The right gits pitched into the ditch too many times, to suit me! That's whatever!"

And then, holding the pistol ready for use, he hurried on in the retreating footsteps of Jepley Hill.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOLLOWED BY FOES.

LET us return to the Crescent City Sport.

After killing the bloodhounds, he continued on down the river, stopping from time to time to listen to the sounds that indicated pursuit.

These ceased after awhile, and he knew he had baffled his enemies, for the time being at least.

He was thoroughly tired out by his exertions, but he feared to stop for the purpose of resting, and so continued on at as good a gait as he could, until he had passed over a long distance.

Though he looked constantly, nowhere could he discover a boat.

Before morning, feeling he could go no further, young Scales crept into a clump of bushes, where he lay down, thoroughly exhausted; and, as a natural consequence, he soon fell asleep.

He awoke, with a start, many hours afterward. The sun was shining down on him with great fervor, and the mists arising from an adjacent swamp made the heat close and oppressive.

He stretched himself and walked down to

the river's edge, where he indulged in the luxury of a bath.

He was hungry, but had nothing to eat.

It seemed clear that he had completely beaten his pursuers of the night.

After looking carefully around, in the hope of finding one of the boats that had eluded him all night, and finding nothing, he turned his face once more down the river.

He did not know how many miles it was to New Orleans, but he was determined to walk the distance in as short a time as possible.

He wondered what things were occurring, and what had occurred, back at the plantation; and tried to picture the face of the woman he loved, at the moment she made that declaration of a return of his affection.

In truth, Scales's thoughts were seldom away from her for any length of time.

The tramp was a tiring one, but, shortly before noon, he came on a negro, who was seated in a dugout canoe, fishing.

The sport shouted to him, induced him to paddle near, and bargained with him to be conveyed to New Orleans.

"How far is it?" he asked.

"'Bout twenty-five miles, marsel!"

For five dollars, the negro, who lived in a shanty not far away, and who was a free man and a professional fisher, agreed to paddle the sport to the city in the dugout.

There was a chance, of course, that traveling in this manner would expose the sport to the eyes of his enemies; and he made the negro promise that the journey should be made in the night.

The black, then, continued his fishing; and Scales devoured some of the pone furnished by him, and ate a fish broiled quickly on some coals.

The day passed tediously. He slept as much as he could, though thoughts of what he had gone through and of trouble possibly in store, together with reflections concerning Fannie Mayport, kept him awake much of the time.

When darkness fell, another meal of corn-pone and fish was eaten; and then the dugout was entered and the darky paddled slowly down the river toward the Crescent City.

The distance must have been much greater than stated, for New Orleans was still far away when morning came, and they felt compelled to run the dugout ashore and camp in the bushes.

This second day was even more tedious than the first; but it, too, was whiled away; and again the log canoe floated down the mighty Mississippi.

After two hours of paddling, the lights of the city were seen; and, some time later, the dugout floated abreast of the great levees and headed for a landing.

The Crescent City Sport had his eyes fixed on the rows of lights, so plainly visible, and his thoughts were engrossed with plans for the immediate future, when a big river steamer glided near, beating the water furiously with her huge paddle-wheels.

The negro pulled out of the way, for the steamboat seemed about to run it down; and then, as it swept by, he steadied the dugout and looked up, with the sport, at the steamboat's decks, crowded with passengers.

Suddenly the young sport started and gave a little cry of surprise.

Standing on the deck and looking straight down into the dugout, which lay plainly revealed under the steamboat's lights, were two men.

One of them was Ward Lewis, and the other was a yellow-skinned rascal, probably half-French, who was one of Lewis's chief henchmen.

Both had been at the plantation, when the Crescent City Sport left there! Why were they entering New Orleans on that boat?

An exclamation also fell from the lips of Lewis; and he was seen to clutch his companion's arm and point a nervous finger at the dugout.

Then the big steamboat swept on; and the dugout lay tossing violently on the rollers which her passage had made.

The negro saw the startled look on the face of his employer; but he held his tongue, no matter what his thoughts and conjectures, and threw his energies into the work in hand.

When the waves had ceased to roll so

much, he headed the boat again toward the levee; and, after a time, succeeded in running it up against a landing, where cotton bales were thickly piled.

Considerable time elapsed, though, before the sport was set ashore on the wharf.

He paid the negro; and the dugout dropped away, out of sight, almost immediately.

Wondering what the coming of Lewis and his companion to the Crescent City meant, the sport started to walk around the bales of cotton, to the street, not far beyond.

The night was hot, in spite of the river breeze that now and then came; and a bright southern moon made all things almost as light as day.

Without a moment's warning, as he turned about, Scales found himself face to face with Ward Lewis and the yellow-eyed rascal, seen by him on the big steamboat so short a time before.

There could be no doubt that they had hurried to the wharf for the purpose of way-laying him, and perhaps of murdering him.

Ward Lewis leaped quickly forward. The sport evaded his rush; and, then, by a deft and agile movement, placed himself between his foes, thus forcing Lewis near the dangerous edge of the wharf.

Scales was rendered desperate by their attack, for he felt that his life hung in the balance.

It seemed clear, now, that they had been sent on by Jep Hill to find him and murder him.

He threw himself on the defensive and watched warily the movements of his foes.

He did not give the villains a chance to rush on him or to crowd him into the stream.

On the contrary, when Ward Lewis made a second dash, the Crescent City Sport struck with such force that the ruffian reeled backward into the swiftly-flowing river!

Lewis threw up his hands and uttered a loud cry, as he fell headlong, under the force of that stinging blow, so truly delivered.

The sport turned, expecting a hand-to-hand combat with Lewis's companion, but the cowardly rascal darted away into the adjacent street, when he saw his leader fall, seeming to care nothing for that leader's fate.

"I don't want to drown the scamp," was the sport's thought, as he peered over the edge of the wharf into the water. "That was rather a knock-down lick, and I don't know if he'll be in very good shape for swimming, after it!"

He expected to see the head of the villain appear on the surface of the river; but, when he had looked for several minutes without seeing anything of the kind, considerations of safety induced him to turn about.

"It's pretty hard to drown a rat of that sort!" was his reflection. "Ward Lewis isn't dead, I'm pretty sure! I don't doubt he'll turn up, one of these days, at a time and place where he can do me the most harm!"

CHAPTER XIV.

GABE GANDERFOOT TO THE FORE.

AFTER leaping away, far enough to secure his own safety, as he thought, Ward Lewis's yellow-faced pard, who bore the suggestive appellation of Scaley Castro, squatted behind some cotton-bales, to await the turn of events.

He had seen the blow delivered by the Crescent City Sport, had beheld Ward Lewis tumble backward into the water; and had heard the resounding splash.

Coming to the conclusion that Lewis would not again be seen by the sport, that night, Castro was on the point of hurrying toward the French Market, when a step near him caused him to hesitate and again crouch down.

He half-twisted himself about, to get a view of the face of the new-comer; and recoiled, with a cry of surprise, when he made out the well-known features of the Hoosier Detective, and—what was worse—knew he had himself been seen.

At almost the same instant, Ganderfoot took a quick, forward step and reached out a hand to clutch and detain him.

"No you don't!" Castro grated, springing to his feet and turning aside the extended hand with a fierce blow. "What do you want with me?"

Naturally, his astonishment was very great. The Hoosier Detective was the very last man he would have thought of seeing there. Why had the detective come?

Ganderfoot was not as quick of foot as Castro, and the latter would have escaped without trouble, if his foot had not turned and thrown him down.

Before he could recover and bound away, the detective was on him.

But Castro was quite as much of a squirmer as any serpent of the Louisiana marshes. In truth, he was, to use a common phrase, "as slippery as an eel."

Ganderfoot tried to throw his long arms about the yellow-faced scamp and hold him by sheer force.

But the fellow wriggled from the detective's embrace.

"No you don't!" he cried again, striking out as before, to the infinite peril of Ganderfoot's optics. "No you don't do anything of the kind!"

Castro was wild with terror; and well he might be, for steps of some one, hurrying to the scene of action, sounded plainly and unpleasantly near.

They were the steps of the sport, as Castro was pretty sure, and caused Castro to fight as if fighting for his life.

Ganderfoot made a quick rush, hoping to get the villain in his clutches; but Castro dodged, as before, and then leaped away.

The detective lifted a pistol, as if he meant to fire; but Castro interposed a bale of cotton between him and the shot, and glided out of sight.

Almost at the same moment, the sport hurried up, attracted by the noise.

He was quite surprised, of course, at seeing the Hoosier Detective.

"It was that pard of Ward Lewis's!" explained Ganderfoot, nodding in the direction taken by Castro. "He got away from me! Was you after him?"

This called for explanations, which were freely given.

"So Lewis come on a steamboat!" said Ganderfoot. "The chances air big, then, I reckon, that Jep Hill was on the same boat!"

This seemed likely; and, when they had made sure that Castro was not hiding in the vicinity, they walked on toward the steamboat landing, intending to visit the boat and endeavor to ascertain the names of the passengers.

The steamboat was found, after a time, though there was hardly any one aboard of her. The officers, for the major part, had gone ashore, and the passengers had preceded the officers.

A negro planted himself in the way, when the sport and Ganderfoot came up to the boat's side and made as if they meant to come aboard.

"What's wanted?" he growled. "Dish yer' hain't no time fer to come hyer, so't ain't!"

Both Ganderfoot and the sport were willing to admit as much; but they voiced their request to be permitted to go aboard, nevertheless.

Their imperative request was really a demand; and, when it was repeated, the negro called to some one.

In reply, the clerk of the boat made his appearance.

"We have acquaintances that we think came down on your boat!" informed the sport, in his oiliest tones. "If you will permit us to look at your list of passengers, it will be a favor! We did not, till awhile ago, know that the boat had arrived; and so missed them, that is, if they were here!"

"What were their names?" the clerk asked.

"Jepsey Hill and Ward Lewis!" the sport responded.

"No such men came down with us!" was the reply.

"You will let us examine the books, will you not? You may have forgotten the names!"

The clerk was sure he had not, but he complied, and granted them an inspection of the passenger list.

Neither the names of Ward Lewis, Scaley Castro nor Jepsey Hill were to be found.

"Your friends' names are not here, you see!" assumed the clerk, with some show of triumph.

"We were mistaken!" the sport admitted. "We thought surely we would find their names!"

"One thing's powerful plain," said Ganderfoot, when they were ashore and hurrying away from the boat landing, "them chaps, for some reason, didn't want their names to be known."

It was very plain, as Ganderfoot said. Lewis and Castro had been on the boat! There was no doubt of that, in the mind of the sport! And if they had taken passage under false names, had not Jep Hill taken passage under a false name?

It was altogether likely.

However, it was quite impossible for the Crescent City Sport to hold his mind to this search and its result; and the steamboat had not been left two squares behind them when he turned to a rediscussion of the flight of Fannie Mayport from the plantation and the arrest and escape of Jep Hill, together with Colonel Mayport's half insane conduct.

"Of course she is here in New Orleans!" he averred.

"Not likely to be any place else!" Ganderfoot agreed. "Everybody in this country jist as nacherly strikes fer New Orleans, when they strike fer any place, as the old Romans used to strike fer Rome!"

"Then I'm bound to find her, sooner or later!" with growing earnestness and enthusiasm. "If she hasn't committed suicide!"

The Hoosier Detective solemnly shook his head. He had considered this a possibility, but was not now willing to admit it as such.

"Never a girl like her would do sich a thing! She was too sensible—too bright, too— Well, she jist wouldn't do it!"

"I hope you are right!" and the sport seemed to breathe freer. "Yes, I am sure you are right! Even though she was cast off by that old scoundrel of a father, she wouldn't do that! I never would have believed that Colonel Mayport was such a heartless and unmitigated villain!"

"But I will find Fannie, if she is in New Orleans! I'll find her, if she's above ground! I know I can depend on you, Ganderfoot, to help me in the search!"

He peered into the solemn face of his detective friend, as if he would read the latter's inmost thoughts.

"You bet!" was Ganderfoot's fervent reply. "You may count on me. I'll stay with you till the cows come home!"

CHAPTER XV.

UNDER THE WHARF.

THE sport was right in his conjecture that Ward Lewis had not met death in the swiftly-flowing river.

Although stunned by the concussion of the blow that reeled him backward from the wharf, and choked by the water that filled his nose and mouth, Lewis speedily regained a full knowledge of where he was and what had befallen him.

He also knew his exact location, with reference to objects on the water front; which was an extremely lucky thing for him, under the circumstances.

Fearing to rise to the surface, he struggled desperately against the choking sensation that distressed him, and swam hurriedly toward the shore.

He touched the lower edge of the wharf; and there arose to the surface, and was able to get the water out of his nostrils, mouth and eyes.

The sport had not yet turned from the wharf. Lewis was sure of this, though he could not see the sport's figure.

The lights of the streets did not fall on the point where Lewis's head now rested; therefore, feeling reasonably secure, he clutched the slippery sides of the heavy timbers and hung there, with his body in the water.

The racing footsteps of Castro reached him, with considerable distinctness; and then he heard something of the struggle between Castro and the Hoosier Detective, though he could not understand fully its nature.

They were not far from him, being down stream from the Cotton wharf where stood the Crescent City Sport; and, after a time, he caught Castro's excited exclamations.

He naturally supposed Castro had fallen into the hands of a policeman; and, though

he much regretted it, he was not willing to crawl out of the water and hurry to the help of the man who had assisted him on so many occasions.

When the fight was over and Castro gone, and the sport and Ganderfoot began their conversation, Lewis lifted himself still higher out of the water, and listened, with bated breath, to the words of the sport and the detective.

And what he heard was well worth listening to. It put him in possession of a number of important facts.

When they departed toward the steamboat landing, still talking, Lewis sunk quietly beneath the water, instead of crawling out on the wharf, as would have been anticipated.

He had a clearly defined object in so doing. He did not know but the river front was being watched. He did not know but the walk toward the steamboat landing was a ruse intended to entice him from the water into a trap.

And, besides, an opening to a very safe retreat was just at hand, and easy of access by the means he was pursuing.

When he had sunk from sight, he swam back to a point just beneath the place from which he had fallen when struck by the sport.

Swimming straight at the wharf, he passed beneath it and came up in a dark and damp space.

Not a ray of light reached him there, and the air was foul and unwholesome. Noisome vapors seemed to poison it, and the slime of the river to spread itself over the chasm thus invaded.

The place was familiar to Lewis; and, after crawling carefully forward, he bumped against what seemed a board wall.

On this he rapped softly, and the rap was instantly answered.

The sliding of a panel was heard, and then a low voice inquired:

"Who comes there?"

"It's me! Ward Lewis! I had to jump into the river! Let me in! I'm as wet as a rat and half drowned!"

Subdued voices were heard in consultation; and then a door moved, revealing a black opening, through which a dim light shone. Two men stood near this opening, as if to repel invaders, should Lewis's words prove false.

Ward Lewis crawled through the opening; then the slimy door swung into place behind him, and the river roared on its way to the sea without sending a sound to disturb the inmates of this singular den.

After turning a bulwarked angle, the light, which had been so dim, flashed out in greater strength, and showed the characteristics of the place.

Three or four men, sprawled on rude bunks, winked and blinked at Lewis, as he made his appearance, accompanied by those who gave him admittance.

They had evidently been sleeping, but now they sat up, roused to interest.

"Wot's the row?" one of them growled, his words rumbling in the depths of his hairy and cavernous throat like the distant echoes of low thunder.

He glowered at Lewis, and thrust a dirty hand through a mass of disheveled hair.

"It's all right!" the leader of the guards, who had admitted Lewis, made answer, not pleased at the criticism. "I never lets in any one that ain't as straight as a string, an' you know that yerself, Shaggy Brown; that's wot, you know!"

"Mebbe I do," said Brown. "That's the chap frum up river, I see! My eyes was kind o' blurred!"

"Too plaguey much whisky 'll blur anybody's eyes!"

The man tried to laugh, as he hurled this retort, but the laugh was something of a miscarriage.

"I'm Ward Lewis!" Lewis put in. "I'm the right hand man of a man you know mighty well, Jepley Hill by name! Ah! I knowed that'd settle you! Jep Hill's my master, an' Jep Hill's a man to tie to! I half expected to find him in this den!"

"Air you plumb shore he's in town?" Shaggy Brown inquired, his displeasure vanishing and his interest quickening. "He was up the river! Killed a man up there—some'eres about Louisville, seems to me!"

"Better not let him hear you say it!" Lewis warned. "He says he done no sich a thing!"

"Reported on him, anyhow, though I don't think the police air onto it!"

"Oh, they're onto it, well enough! One of 'em follered him all the way down the river, and arrested him on Colonel Mayport's plantation; but Hill was too sharp for him. Give him the slip!"

Shaggy Brown sat bolt upright, a curse on his lips.

The fear of the murderer and deeply-dyed villain was in his eyes. They were bleared and bloodshot, and filled with a look that showed the terror that crouched constantly in the scoundrel's heart.

"And he'll bring 'em right here!" was his scared ejaculation. "He'll head right for this den, jist as you did! He'll have the police on top of our backs, inside of twenty-four hours. It beats all creation! I thought this was a place where we could feel safe!"

"So it is!" averred Lewis, looking about at the damp walls. "Never a policeman in New Orleans will look for a feller here. The only trouble is, whoever stays in here long's liable to die of consumption!"

"What'd you come here fur, if you're 'fraid of the place?" Shaggy demanded.

"To git some dry clothes!" said Lewis, looking down on his dripping garments.

Little pools stood at his feet, and united in forming a tiny stream that ran away into the darkness.

A more unprepossessing place for the abode of human kind could not have been found. It was almost bare of furniture. A few bunks and cots, some boxes and chairs, a rickety table, and a charcoal stove constituted its belongings.

Yet it was beloved by many a villain, because it gave shelter and refuge.

The men now in it all owed allegiance to the band of scoundrels that acknowledged the leadership—if it may be called leadership—of Jepley Hill!

Lewis shaped his request for dry garments in different phrase, and some ragged clothing was hunted out for his benefit.

When he had clothed himself in the things given, he resembled an animated rag-bag more than a human being.

But the clothing was warm and comparatively dry, and that was a great deal, and the shivering that had distressed him soon passed away.

Hill did not come; but, after a time, there was admitted into this underground nest of thieves and cut-throats, the man who had run from the grasp of the Hoosier Detective.

Ward was not pleased at the manner in which Scaley Castro had abandoned him on the cotton wharf, and did not hesitate to say so.

"Why didn't you ride his back an' stick him?" Ward growled. "When he struck at me that way was your chance! You was too much of a coward, that's what!"

Castro showed his teeth; cruelly, though he tried to hide it by twisting his yellow face into a smile.

"I wouldn't have left you, if I could have done anything else! But you was in the river before I knowed it, 'most; and I knowed you'd make fer this place, and I was blamed sure I couldn't do anything with that sport, by myself! And, besides, I heard the sport's pard a-comin', and so I cut sticks, jist as you'd 'a' done under the same circumstances!"

"No use quarrelin' 'bout that!" Shaggy growled. "The question is, what air we goin' to do if the police comes? They're hot after you two, 'cordin' to your own showin'; and they're a good deal hotter after Jep Hill, fer that there murder; and the hull caboodle of us'll be gobbled, if we don't watch! That's what! Better think o' that, 'stid o' quarrelin'!"

"Oh, you're skeert!" declared Lewis, somewhat savagely. "You're allus runnin', when no one else thinks of danger! I wisht you wouldn't bother me with your grumble. If the police comes, wake me, so I can see 'em! Tany rate, 'wake me early, mother; wake me early, mother dear, fer I'm to be Queen of the May!"

Thus mumbling and grumbling, and trying to be humorous even in his anger, Lewis threw himself down on one of the bunks and sought the rest that comes through slumber.

CHAPTER XVI.

HANNES SNICKELFRITZ.

"Dis vhas about dhe dullest tay dot I see in a mant uff Montays! I ain't sold a picayune's vort' dhis efenin'!"

The growl came from the hairy throat of a German, who sat in his stall, which was a little cubby-hole, at the side of the pavement in the famous French Market!

He had bought the privileges of the stall only a day or two before, so that his grumbling seemed without good foundation. He could not have known, from personal experience, that this day was the dullest in a month.

If the reader will peer, with the writer, beneath the shock of yellow German hair, look under the disguising beard, and scrutinize, with care, the lines of the face, he will see that this apparent Dutchman is an old friend—in truth none other, than the Hoosier Detective, Gabe Ganderfoot!

But no one, even after a critical examination, unless forewarned to look for certain things, would have deemed the Dutchman other than he professed.

To all seeming, he was a typical representative of the Fatherland, not many months in this country.

Above the door of the booth was the name,

"HANNES SNICKELFRITZ."

By this name the Dutchman was known to the few who had come in contact with him.

But he was not alone in the little stand in the French Market of New Orleans. A boy occupied it with him. A boy who was also masquerading.

This boy has not been introduced to the reader, but he was a certain small cousin of Fannie Mayport, and, until a few days previous, had resided on Colonel Mayport's plantation.

Like almost every one else connected with that unhappy place, he had gravitated to New Orleans, by a seeming instinct, yet with a fairly well defined object in view.

He wanted to assist in a search for Fannie, who had always been markedly kind to him; and, being something of a detective by nature, he had located Ganderfoot; and now he was here in the stall, endeavoring to assist Ganderfoot in every way possible.

As to his disguise, it was simpler than the detective's, though quite as effectual. His white face had been tanned to a walnut hue, by a preparation that Ganderfoot had applied, and this alteration, with a wig of kinky hair and necessary changes of voice and speech, so transformed the lad that his most intimate acquaintance would have passed him by without recognition.

The boy's real name was William Basil, though the pretended German now called him Bob Bream.

The new and strange existence on which the boy had so suddenly been launched held great attractions for him. He was in his element; feeling the thrill of exciting adventures, and, at the same time, realizing that the work engaged in was of some value, and might even be of immense profit to the young woman he desired to serve.

As to age, he was probably fourteen or fifteen; but he was as keen and shrewd as many a boy of greater years.

"I dthink me I von't stay py dhis pizness a goot while, uff id ton'd bay me petter ash dhis!" the Dutchman continued, seemingly determined to keep up the grumbling, from lack of something better to do. "Ve ain'd pait oxbenses, dhis tay, nod py a goot teal! Look at those oysders! Look at those pananas and oranches! Yoost sboiling, efery vun uff dhem! Id make me sick, a pizness like dhem! Dthese beebles don't got any money, I pelief me!"

A twinkle rested in the eye of the seeming young mulatto. It always amused him when Snickelfritz began one of those tirades for the benefit of the occupants of the adjoining stalls.

He knew that the pretended Dutchman was indulging in this talk for the sole purpose of more thoroughly convincing these people that he was just what he seemed; and he knew, too, that the man in the nearest stall was the one to whom the Dutchman was more particularly directing his remarks.

This man was a swarthy-faced individual, with little twinkling eyes and a low and cunning brow. He was a Frenchman, or of

French extraction, that was plain, even if his speech had not shown it.

Certain things seen by the Hoosier Detective since landing in New Orleans had made him think this man was a "fence" for thieves, and in close communication with Ward Lewis and Scaley Castro.

If this were true, then the quickest way to get on the trail of Jepley Hill was to watch this man and his associates.

The occupation of the adjacent stall, in disguise, promised more in that line than any other plan that could be readily devised; so, in consequence, we find the detective in the French Market, as one of the dealers of the place.

He was sure his disguise was not suspected, and already certain happenings made him glad he had taken the stall and set himself to thus spy the Frenchman.

Several men had visited the Frenchman and whispered long and low concerning "swag" and "booty" and "boodle;" and their words had not gone unheard by the keen-eared detective.

Another strong reason inducing the detective to pitch his tent in the shelter of the French Market was the fact that the cotton wharf, from which Lewis had been knocked, and near which Castro had disappeared, was not far distant from it.

In truth, when the street was not too crowded with heavy wagons, the cotton wharf was in full view from the stall occupied by the Dutchman.

Ganderfoot felt there was some mystery connected with the cotton wharf; and as many times a day as he could, without inconvenience or suspicion, he strolled along this wharf, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his long Dutch pipe in his mouth, seeing everything and appearing to see nothing.

Had it not been for the boy who had opportunely given his services to Ganderfoot, the latter would not have been able to occupy the stall with as much satisfaction as was now possible; for the boy spoke French with the ease of a native of the French section of the city.

Hence, every transaction occurring in the stall of the Frenchman, and in which the language of La Belle France was used, fell on ears that fully comprehended the words.

The boy shifted, as he listened quietly to Ganderfoot's growling comment, and smiled out of his brown eyes.

"Think you hain't a-gittin' rich, marse? Dish yer' nigger doan' calc'late dat anybody in dish yer' market has done got rich to-day. Been a powerful po' day fer bizness, sho'!"

His rich, negro-like accent, his yellow face, dark eyes, and the ragged clothes that covered him, made him seem a tattered ducky, in every respect.

Hannes Snickelfritz nodded approvingly, and again began to growl.

The lights in the streets—for the day was at an end and the thoroughfares were being lighted—began to shine in long rows, and Snickelfritz spoke of closing up the shop, when he was interrupted and his plans changed by the entrance of a man, who hurried along a fruity aisle, and stopped before the Frenchman.

Instantly the boy edged toward that side of the stall and grew all attention, even while pretending to arrange a basket of fruit in better shape for display.

"There'll be a lot of swag for you from that other, which I hope you can dispose of!"

The boy started, for, though the words were spoken in French, and the man differed in appearance from Scaley Castro, yet he knew this was Castro's voice.

The Dutchman was aware of the same fact, though he could not understand the words; and he trembled slightly.

"There'll be more'n that for all of us, if the captain can find that girl. He promises a thousand dollars to the man that locates her; and a thousand apiece all around, if he succeeds in marrying her and getting her fortune."

"The colonel's gone back on him, but he is going to work the thing, anyhow! So, just keep your eyes open! May be you can get the first thousand! It's something worth working for!"

There was a good deal more of the same

sort, all in French and in whispers, but the boy caught all of it; and rehearsed it, almost word for word, to the detective, as soon as he could.

Enough had been heard to show that Castro referred to Colonel Mayport, Fannie and Jepley Hill. Their names, even, had been used a time or two, risky as that was.

Castro, after he had whispered awhile, sat down in the entrance of the stall, twisted some tobacco, and began to smoke.

"Watch him like a hawk!" the pretended Dutchman whispered. "If he gets up to leave, let me know it!"

With this, he dropped in behind a little screen he had erected; where he was as completely hidden from view as if he had gone into the ground.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DARING DUTCHMAN.

SNICKELFRITZ had hardly been in this closet-like place five minutes, when the boy shook the dark curtain and announced:

"He's going!"

Short as had been the time, it had been enough to enable the detective to thoroughly alter his appearance.

He reached out and drew the boy down, until the ear of the latter touched his lips, and whispered back:

"Stay here and watch! I'm goin' to foller that chap! If I'm not back by midnight, look for me along the wharves; and, if you don't find me, you'll then know what to do!"

He vanished, with this, and emerged from the stall, at the other end, which opened out into a darkish hole, where he was not in much danger of being seen.

Scaley Castro was already out in the street, under the glare of the lamps; and, if the detective had not previously seen and marked his appearance, he would not have recognized him.

He dropped quickly into the footsteps of Castro; and, when the lights of the street flared above him, the great change made in his general looks was manifest.

He was neither the Dutchman, Hannes Snickelfritz, nor the Hoosier Detective, Gabe Ganderfoot; but was a coal-black negro, clad in shabby, mud-stained clothes.

Such negroes were too common thereabout to attract a moment's attention. The wharves and the river front swarmed with them. For this reason, Ganderfoot had selected the negro disguise, knowing it would be as impenetrable and as safe a one as he could assume.

Scaley Castro, after a backward glance to assure himself he was not followed, walked straight ahead down the river, giving not the least heed to the boxes, barrels and bales piled everywhere, nor a word to the negroes who perspired and struggled in their efforts to remove these miniature mountains.

Though the day's work was done, there were still enough negroes toiling away on the water front to make a good-sized regiment.

Satisfied he had not been observed by unfriendly eyes, Scaley Castro approached an oyster-boat and climbed aboard it.

It was a sloop, that had brought a cargo of oysters from Biloxi, or some point on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, as the detective supposed; and the lights of the street shining against it revealed the name, "Ida May!"

No one was stirring on the Ida May; and, when the detective had watched the sloop for some time and was convinced that he might safely approach, he climbed close up to her, then, after a time, swung himself aboard, as he had seen Castro do.

This was a risky performance; for it was pretty certain that the sloop belonged to members of the band who owed allegiance to Jepley Hill.

That any member of this band would be glad to stick a knife into the Hoosier Detective, the latter fully believed; but this belief did not deter him.

The Ida May had been filled with oysters, but was now about empty; and, assured Castro had gone below, into the cuddy or into a bunk, the detective boldly followed, anxious to look in and discover whatever was to be discovered there that might be of value or service.

In doing this, he speedily found himself in a trap. Scaley was not to be seen; but

several men—three or four, at least—came on board, and began to make preparations for dropping out into the stream.

The pretended negro crawled from the cuddy, where he had been prying about, and glanced toward the land.

Already the *Ida May* had been cast off, and the movement of the current of the great river was perceptibly felt.

It was very clear that the detective could not spring to the wharf, nor could he leave the boat without detection.

In this dilemma, he crawled down on top of some oysters, and in this foul and wet place he crouched, waiting the turn of events.

If worst came to worst, he could spring overboard, and trust to swimming; though the river was very deep there, and he could not swim with the fish-like ease of Ward Lewis.

The greatest danger he would be in, perhaps, if he tried that means of getting off the boat, was that he would be seen or heard, and fired at in the water.

Under such circumstances, even a slight wound, if disabling, might prove fatal.

As he crouched thus on the odorous oysters, he saw Scaley Castro appear from some invisible portion of the boat, and, hearing, at the same time, the talk of those who were in command of the vessel, he began to wonder if Castro had not seen him and penetrated his disguise.

He even began to fear that the appearance of Castro at the French Market had been for the purpose of decoying him aboard the sloop.

However, even if all these conjectures were true, there was no help for them.

The detective had been in greater perils and had always escaped without serious injury! He would trust to the same good fortune or kind Providence that had hitherto sustained him!

With this philosophical reflection, Ganderfoot crouched lower on the oysters, and strained his ears to hear the commands and the talk going on not so very far away.

Most of it came clearly enough.

He could feel the motion of the boat as the current beat against it.

It was not being pulled by a tug, nor propelled by sails, but was swinging out from the shore and down the stream by the force of the river's flow.

The words of the commander told him, too, that the shore was already some distance away.

He could not understand why the *Ida May* was swinging away from the levee in that quiet, and seemingly surreptitious manner, unless—and here he caught his breath—the crew knew he was aboard, and meant to take him to some point where they could slay him without personal peril or much danger of discovery.

It was a thought to thrill the bravest.

He had heard the voice of Ward Lewis, though the voice of the one in control of the boat was unknown to him.

"If we kin git the swag to t'other shore and into the hands of our friends over there, be hanged to the police!"

These words, spoken somewhat nervously, reassured the cowering detective. They told his presence aboard was unknown, and that the movement of the sloop was for the purpose of getting rid of some articles which they feared might betray them to the police.

Then, a daring resolution came into the heart of the pretended black:

"I'll risk the stowaway trick!"

If found, he could profess that he was in a desperate state, through lack of work, and had stolen on board the oyster boat, feeling he would get something to eat there and employment.

"I'll tell 'em I'm a free black! Mebby they'll want to sell me! But—"

He turned to an easier posture, looked up at the stars, and began to mature his new scheme.

And all the while the talk of Ward Lewis and his associates came to him, with pleasing distinctness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LEAP FOR LIFE.

DANGER to the pretended negro did not come for some time—not until the sloop had

drifted a considerable distance down-stream and had been guided almost to the opposite shore.

One of the men, a stranger to the detective, leaped across the oyster heap; and, in so doing, struck his foot against the pretended negro.

He fell prostrate, but, springing up, bawled out, in some perplexity, for a light.

The noise and the stumbling kick aroused the negro, who, when the lantern was produced, stared, in seeming fright, at those gathered about him.

Of course, the crew of the sloop did not recognize him, nor did they dream he was not a negro.

"What are you doin' here?" Ward Lewis growled, lifting his foot as if to administer a kick.

The negro scrambled to his feet and put forth his hands, appealingly.

"Please God, marse, I hain't done nuffin' 'tall to ca'se you to kick me. I jes' clam on dis boat wile ergo, when nobody was on her, an' waited fer you-alls to come, an'—an'—I 'low I mus' 'a' fell asleep! Dat's de blessed trufe!"

The tones were filled with apparent sincerity, and the words were almost tearful.

"What's your name?" was the next question.

"Julius Caesar Johnsing, marse!"

"An' your master's name?"

"Hain't got no marster, please God! Ise a free nigger, I is!"

"The deuce you are! You're a liar and a spy, that's what you are!"

A sudden suspicion lighted the face of Lewis.

"I'm tellin' you nuffin' but de hones' trufe, marse!" the black asserted. "Hope I may die, if I hain't. I wouldn't lie to no white gemmans like you is! If you was jes' common no-count niggers, I mou't tell you a little bitty lie, but I never been in de habit of lyin' to white folks; and bless God, I hain't never gwine to git into sich a habit!"

He stood up sturdily before Ward Lewis, as he said this, never flinching under the fierce gaze Lewis was bending on him.

And so excellent was his dialect and so good his disguise that Lewis never once suspected him of being the Hoosier Detective, nor did he dream the man was not a negro.

What he did think, though, was that the black was a spy of Gabe Ganderfoot, or of the Crescent City Sport.

In no other way could he account for the black's presence on the sloop, in a manner satisfactory to himself.

"I was jest a-huntin' fer some wuk, marse!" the negro continued, as if interpreting the thought of Lewis. "I hain't had a good bite dis blessed day; that I hain't. An' I 'low if I come on dis boat, and you puts out to sea wif her, dat mebbe when you fin's me out dere, you'd gib me suffin' to eat! Dat's jes' what I 'lowed; an' case of dat I come aboard."

"You're lyin'!" declared Lewis, with much deliberation. "Somebody told you to come aboard this boat!"

He held the light close up to the darky's face, thinking by so doing and by this positive assertion to betray the negro into some movement or word of betrayal.

But, the thing did not work. The blacked detective never showed the least trepidation, or in any way evinced that he was not what he seemed.

However, Ward Lewis was not satisfied.

In his own mind, he was quite sure the negro was a spy—so sure of it that he was rendered not only angry, but desperate.

The darkly-flowing river was suggestive. There was no other boat near. The city was far astren. A murder, committed then and there, would have no witnesses, aside from the crew of the *Ida May*.

Like a flash these murderous thoughts went through the evil brain of Ward Lewis; and as quick as lightning, almost, his pistol came out.

But, quick as he was, he was not quick enough for the Hoosier Detective.

The detective had been noting every thought in the face of the scoundrel, and saw murder so plainly written there that he anticipated this movement to kill him.

So that, before the pistol came up on a level, he had flung himself overboard, with

supreme recklessness, feeling that to be safer than to risk the shot from Ward's pistol.

A cry of surprise came from all on board, when the leap of the negro was seen. It was a thing so wholly unexpected. Not even Lewis had dreamed of such an intention on the part of the black!

The pistol did not spurt its fire, for the leap stayed the hand of Lewis, until it was too late for a shot to be of service.

Lewis and his associates hurried to the sides of the boat and looked down in the water, thinking the head of the negro would quickly appear; and a boat was dropped into the stream for the purpose of picking him up when he came to the surface.

What Ward took to be a woolly head was visible for a moment, and Ward fired at it; but was unable to tell whether it was hit or not, as it instantly disappeared.

However, the black, floating object was not the head of the detective!

When Ganderfoot sprung from the sloop into the stream, he fell feet foremost, and went down, down, until he felt sure he was going to the bottom of the river.

Then he began to ascend.

As stated, he was not as good a swimmer as Ward Lewis had shown himself to be; still, he could swim tolerably well, and he was not panic-stricken by the thought that he was in the mighty Mississippi, hundreds of yards from land.

He knew Ward Lewis would shoot at his head, as soon as it was seen; and he tried to come up, therefore, under the edge of the sloop, where the projecting sides, or the shadows, would hide him.

The sloop was also floating down-stream, so that this did not seem a difficult thing to do.

Instead of rising under the sloop, though, as he planned, he came up at the edge of a small boat, which the sloop was towing.

This was much better, and he felt a thrill of gratification when he realized the nature of the shelter that screened him from the gaze of the crew of the *Ida May*.

He heard the excited words of the men, saw the flash of the pistol, and beheld the lowering of the boat from the sloop.

But he was not discovered, though once the searching boat came very near him.

Clinging to the towed boat with both hands, it was no trick at all to keep afloat.

Fortunately the water was not cold, so that he did not suffer from his enforced bath.

After a time the lowered boat returned to the sloop, and was hoisted, and the heads that had peered so persistently over the stream disappeared one by one.

Ganderfoot felt that now his time for action had arrived.

He swam slowly along the side of the boat, retaining his hold on it until he reached the small cable by which it was being towed.

This he succeeded in cutting with his knife, and then clung to the boat, until it drifted slowly away and out of sight of any one on the sloop.

When quite sure it could not be sighted from the *Ida May*, he partially freed it of water, and climbed into it.

There was one oar lying on the bottom, and this he took up and began to guide and propel the craft toward the New Orleans side of the river.

Far away he could see the lights of the town, and the glare on the sky which marks the presence of a city.

He steered toward these, and was conscious that he was making some progress, in spite of the fact that the current beat against him, and he had only one oar.

He had not a doubt now that he would finally be able to reach the levee, and so he dipped the oar sturdily, and cheerfully continued the severe toil.

CHAPTER XIX!

A GLIMPSE OF A LOVED FACE.

AT almost the same moment that the Hoosier Detective was clinging to the sloop's boat, in fear of discovery, the Crescent City Sport was strolling leisurely and thoughtfully along Julia street.

It is not a busy street, now; and it was less so, then.

The sport had walked down from the St. Charles Hotel, and had strolled on and

on, for no particular reason, except that the hotel rooms were hot and he delighted in walking.

Only a few days had elapsed since his flight from the plantation of Colonel Mayport, yet those few days had marked him as months had not done.

He was sure that somewhere in the bustling, struggling Crescent City was the woman he loved, if she were still on earth; and yet he could not find a trace of her.

He had exhausted almost every resource in his search, without avail; and now he was moody and disconsolate.

Ganderfoot had endeavored to assist him, calling into use the marvelous detective craft of which he was master, but he had accomplished no more than the sport.

Both confessed themselves baffled.

Thinking of this lack of success, the Crescent City Sport strolled on, striving to hit on a new method that might achieve some result; and, while thus engaged, he passed two women, who were hurrying on in the opposite direction.

His limbs trembled and his face whitened; one of the women, he was sure, was the planter's daughter.

He felt he could not mistake the beauty of that face, the grace of the carriage, the lightness of the step!

Only a glimpse of the features was obtained, and then the loved face was invisible.

Of course there was the possibility that he was mistaken, and, feeling that he ought to be cautious, the sport followed the young women slowly, debating as to the course to pursue.

"I will overtake and pass them and look again!" was his decision.

His heart was tumultuously beating, his pulses reeled, his brain seemed to become suddenly fevered.

There were other people in the street, for the encounter was at a corner, and many were coming and going.

He saw that, if he did not hasten his footsteps, he might lose sight of the women; so he stepped quickly forward.

A cry of fire arose, and, with a clanging and clatter, a fire engine came thundering down the street, the horses racing as if for life.

Vehicles and people crowded to the sides of the street until the fire engine should pass.

The sport turned his head for an instant, and, when he looked again, the two young women were not to be seen!

A terrible fear thrilled him!

"My God, have I lost them?" was his ejaculation, as he broke almost into a run.

When he gained the spot where he had last seen them, he halted and glanced about.

There were women there, and young women, but not the one she sought. Nowhere was to be seen the face and form that had so attracted him; nowhere the woman he loved! If he had indeed seen Fannie Mayport she had vanished as completely as if she had dropped into a grave.

Scales was momentarily wild with the sense of his deep disappointment. Not knowing but she had turned the nearest corner and was hastening on in a new direction, he hurried to the corner, and craned his neck, to behold her, if possible.

But she was not there!

There were houses in abundance, and welcoming doors, into which she might have gone; but he could not enter all the houses he saw at once; and, not knowing what to do, entered none of them, but walked further up the street, thinking to overtake her.

The fire-engine had passed, and the incident was apparently already forgotten by the chattering throngs.

Here and there the sport wandered—looking everywhere for the familiar face and figure, and looking without result.

Fannie Mayport was not thus to be found!

Then he went back to the point where she had been last observed by him, and inquired from house to house if a young lady named Fannie Mayport lived there, or if such a young lady was known to any of the residents.

This plan equally failed and left the sport in despair.

He even began, at times, to doubt if the young woman he had noticed was Fannie Mayport. The sight he had of her was so

brief, so fleeting, so uncertain! He could easily argue himself to the conviction that it was not Fannie, but, when the face rose before his mental vision, the result of his argument was wholly inconclusive—so inconclusive that, at the end of it all, he was more firmly rooted in the belief that the young woman he had seen was Fannie Mayport and none other.

For two hours or more the young man haunted the vicinity where he had lost trace of the young woman; and he was proceeding for the hundredth time to stroll by the corner which he thought they had passed, when he came face to face with Gabe Ganderfoot.

He saw only a tattered, mud-stained and water-soaked negro slinking along the street, and would have passed Ganderfoot by without a glance of recognition, if the detective had permitted it.

The latter had come from the river but a short time before, and was on his way to the stall in the French Market where he had left the boy, when he saw the Crescent City Sport.

There was something in the appearance of the sport that told the detective something of importance had occurred. The sport had the look of a despairing man.

Therefore, when they came close together, Ganderfoot said, in his natural tones:

"Foller me, old boy! An' don't let on that you know me! I want to talk to you!"

The sport, in spite of this warning, stared so hard at the supposed negro that he would have betrayed the secret Ganderfoot wished kept, if there had been any enemies near to observe him.

He could hardly believe that the disreputable negro who uttered those words and then shuffled on was the Hoosier Detective, even though he knew something of Ganderfoot's skill in the disguising line and had seen him in the character of Hannes Snickelfritz.

"That beats my time!" was his mental comment, as he dropped in at Ganderfoot's heels.

A smile lighted his worn face, brought there by the detective's cleverness.

Finally Ganderfoot turned into the alley; and, when the sport followed him, he found the pretended negro standing near the stable, well concealed in the shadows and evidently awaiting his coming!

"What's up?" Ganderfoot asked, as the sport stood at his side. "You look like you'd seen a ghost!"

"Not a ghost," replied the sport, "but a living, breathing woman! The handsomest woman in Louisiana! Fannie Mayport!"

Ganderfoot uttered a subdued exclamation.

"Where is she?"

The other was compelled to confess that he did not know; and then he proceeded to give the detective his experiences of the evening.

"I'll help you!" Ganderfoot promised.

"We'll look that there neighborhood over together, to-morrow and to-morrow night. Jist now I've got to git back to the market, on 'count of that boy!"

Then he shuffled out of the alley and along the street, leaving the sport to his own devices.

CHAPTER XX.

ENGAGED IN A LOSING FIGHT.

THE young woman seen by the Crescent City Sport was Fannie Mayport.

She did not see the sport, however, and had no intention of running away from him, though that is what she probably would have done had she known he was near.

She heard the clangor of the approaching fire-engine and saw the racing horses; and, when the people and vehicles began to crowd together, she drew on the arm of her companion, and they turned into a side street, down which they walked.

A second turn was made only a short distance below the first, and, because of this, the sport lost track of them.

Fannie was tired and worn, as was also her companion, so that they did not hurry their footsteps; and it is a wonder the sport did not behold them, in the course of the search which he instituted.

But, though he once came within a dozen paces of them, a crowd of people hid them from him, and he passed on. Evidently, the fates did not intend that she should be found by him.

When Fannie Mayport fled out into the night from her father's house and from the home that had so long sheltered her, she was in a condition bordering on insanity.

She ran on and on, stung by the words hurled after her, and careless of where she went, until she sunk down from exhaustion. And there she remained for a long time, in a half-unconscious state.

When she came to herself and could think clearly and connectedly, she saw that she had wandered to the further side of the home plantation, and was a long distance from the river.

There seemed nothing she could do but to make her way to New Orleans, and there strive to find some employment by which she could earn a living.

She had no thought of returning to beg her father's forgiveness, for she knew his temper too well to believe he would grant any such request, even though it was made on bended knees.

She had a few acquaintances in the city, but she resolved she would not go near them. They were of the upper classes, who would scorn her for the course she was mapping out.

Her head and her heart ached. She thought of the man to whom she had given her love, and who was a fugitive. Would he, also, seek the Crescent City, and was there any probability that she would meet him there?

And then she pictured such a meeting as she would wish—his surprise and delight; his reaffirmation of love; and let her mind run on and on in the flowery pathway the wild suggestion evoked!

When she grew a little stronger, she recalled a certain colored aunty that lived not far away. This aunty was one of her father's slaves, and was out there in a lonely cabin in the woods, while her husband was cutting wood.

The girl determined to go to this faithful creature, tell her of the great trouble that darkened all things, and beg her for help.

She knew it would be freely given, even though the act might bring down on the heads of the negroes the colonel's condemnation and wrath.

When she had crawled to the cabin and related her story, she was received with as much kindness and consideration as if she were a dethroned and fugitive queen asking favors of an old supporter.

She was forced to remain quiet there throughout the day and night, that her strength might be increased and she be prepared for what lay before her.

In the mean time, the negro visited the great house, where Colonel Mayport still raged and frothed, hoping against hope that a change would be made manifest in favor of his young mistress.

But Uncle Forch, as he was called, was not able to carry back such a pleasant story.

What he was forced to tell, he painted as brightly as he could.

Fortunatus was the black's name, from which came the nickname of "Uncle Forch." But, Fortunatus could bring to Fannie no gift but a faithful and willing and loyal heart, and strong arms, which he freely offered.

Yet he could, and did, mingle his tears with hers, and he prayed for the quick coming of the day when the wrath of the colonel would be turned aside from the helpless girl.

There seemed nothing for Fannie to do but to seek in New Orleans the home that was now denied her by her natural protector, and so Uncle Forch conducted her by secret ways, and through long hours of stealthy rowing, down the great water-way, to the Crescent City.

There she was left by him, alone and forced to face a hard future.

A strong pride—perhaps a foolish pride—kept Fanny Mayport from seeking the homes of any of the people of New Orleans whom she knew.

There were several families in the city that she had met at the watering places of Biloxi, Bay St. Louis and Pass Christian, but she would not, in her present con-

dition, endeavor to renew their acquaintance.

As for relatives, she had none at New Orleans; but if there had been scores of people related to her there by blood or marriage it is a question if she would have made herself known to any of them.

She felt herself cast off from her father's house, and from his love, and, in consequence, from the homes, and love of all his people.

She had a little money with her; and with this she rented a small, furnished room in a tenement near Julia street; which she shared with another impecunious woman, for the purpose of reducing expenses, as she realized she must hoard her small supply of money until she saw a way to obtain more.

This young woman was supporting herself, after a fashion, by plying the needle, and, as Fannie knew something of the art, a portion of the work that came was given to her.

Sometimes there was more than both could do, all wanted in a dreadful hurry, as such work always is; and at other times they had no work at all.

However, they had not progressed so far, when the sport beheld Fannie's face in the street and sought unsuccessfully to follow her; but enough time had elapsed to show Fannie that the fight on which she had entered was a losing one. Enough time had elapsed to inform her that many nights she would be forced to go to bed hungry; that many hours she would be compelled to toil till her eyes and her arms and her back ached intolerably; that many times she would have to do work for which no pay ever came!

It was discouraging; and already its effects were becoming noticeable in her gait and her manner, and, more than all, in the lack-luster of her eyes and the weariness observable in her face.

But, there seemed nothing else she could do.

No word came to tell her what her father and her friends were doing. She keenly wanted to know, but took no steps to ascertain.

She tried to feel that they were, now, so far as she was concerned, inhabitants of another sphere, in whom she should have no interest.

This was a hard thing to do, though; almost as hard as to face the supercilious women who came often to discuss the clothing they desired made and to scold the seamstresses for not doing everything just as they fancied they desired it done.

Truly it was a hard life; and any one gifted with discernment and the foresight of common sense, would have seen that Fannie Mayport would not be able to bear up long under the tremendous mental and physical strain to which she was subjecting herself.

But he who would have helped her gladly, who would have laid down his life for her, passed near her place of abode, without being able to discern the fact; and went on his way, never knowing how short was the distance that had separated them.

How her heart would have thrilled if she could have known of the search that Winthrop Scales was making for her! It would have evidenced his love—would have assured her she was not forgotten by him!

Her thoughts were with him much in those hard, cruel days. For him she was a wanderer from home, a struggler for bread in the city. Because she loved him and had not been ashamed to confess it, her father had cast her out of his heart and life!

Why should she not permit her thoughts to dwell much on the sport, then? She did not try to deny to herself that she loved him, as she never expected to love any one else; but, at the same time she felt she was separated from him forever.

The cruel, cutting words used by her father arose now as a bar between her and Scales. Her father had told her to go to the sport, if she wanted to!

After that she felt she must not meet Scales, must not see him nor hear his voice. If he came near her, if he looked at her or talked to her—especially if he pleaded with her—she was not sure that her resolution to

fight out the battle alone would not break down.

Therefore it is very possible that, if she had known the sport had passed her on the street, and was searching for her so near, she would have taken measures to more effectually baffle him.

And yet she loved him, and felt she could never be happy except as his wife!

So strange are the workings of the human heart!

CHAPTER XXI.

BACK AT THE PLANTATION.

JEP HILL tossed the oars down in the bottom of the skiff, and then leaping ashore, drew the skiff as far up on the land as he could, and secured it, by tying the rope, that hung to its prow, about a log.

His feet were now pressing the old plantation, and just off at the right, through the live oaks that swung their moss dismally, was the home of Colonel Jackson Mayport.

Jep Hill had been set afloat from a steamboat, that did not wish to come further in shore, and had rowed to land. The steamboat was hardly out of sight around a bend, and the "cough" of its exhaust-pipes was still to be heard.

"If I'm as sweet as honey, maybe the old chap will take back the disagreeable things he's been thinking of me, and continue me in his favor!" Jep Hill thought, as he tied the boat and glanced off toward the house. "It won't do to be cut out of that fortune!"

Hill was thinking of the manner in which his duplicity had been shown up by Gabe Ganderfoot; and he was desirous of knowing just what the effect of Ganderfoot's words was on Mayport at this time.

Mayport had had several days in which to reflect.

"I'll tell him Ganderfoot lied like a villain!" Hill mused, as he turned from the river.

"Surely my statements will have some effect! Surely he'll pay more heed to what I say than to what was told him by that irresponsible scoundrel, Gabe Ganderfoot!"

Nevertheless, he was very uneasy and uncertain of the manner of the reception that would be accorded him.

Turning into the well-worn river-path, the path that held such memories for Jep Hill, he moved on toward the house, his mind so much occupied that he failed to take note of the place where he had encountered the sport that unlucky morning not so long before.

He cared very little for the sport, or the sport's opinion, now; as all his mind was given to the task of undoing the work done by Ganderfoot and of diabolizing the colonel of the prejudices he had assimilated.

The first person Hill saw, when he neared the house, was the faithful darky, Richmond, who was always true to Hill's interests.

Hill slipped a coin into the black's hand and drew him aside.

"How is the colonel?" he asked with much anxiety.

"I doan' see dat de cunnel git much better, Marse Hill!" Richmond replied, with a lugubrious shake of his woolly head. "He des moan an' he groan, an' he t'how heself in he sleep, an' he kar'y on drefful! I doan' know what gwine 'come o' de plantation, ef dis yer' bizness is done kep' up by de cunnel much longer! Dat's de hones' trufe, I doan'!"

"What has he said about me?" Hill continued.

"He nebber speak o' you, Marse Hill, to me!"

"Not a word?"

"No so fur as I kin reecommember, he doan', Marse Hill! But ole Aunt Sukey she done tol' me dat he tol' Unc' Jeems dat yo' name wusn't to be spoke ag'in by anybody roun' de house!"

"Who's been here since I've been gone? Has he heard anything from Fannie?"

"No! Marse, no one been yer', an' he doan' hear nuffin' f'um young miss, 'tall! Not hearin' nuffin' f'um de young miss is what is hurtin' de cunnel, in my 'pinion!"

Hill drew away from the garrulous negro and hurried on toward the house.

He was welcomed joyfully by the servants;

but he did not tarry to talk with them, but passed them by and hastened to the colonel's room.

He found the colonel sitting in an easy-chair and looking out over the orange grove, instead of lying in bed, as he had anticipated.

Hill did not fail to observe that a frown gathered on the face of Mayport, when he came within range.

"Why do you come sneaking back here?" Mayport demanded, bridling. "I shouldn't think you'd care to show yourself here again!"

This was so unfavorable a beginning that Jep's heart almost failed him.

Nevertheless, he wreathed his features in a hypocritical smile, and extended his hand in greeting.

Mayport was looking straight at him, but chose not to see the hand.

A hot flush overspread Hill's face at this.

"I came back, colonel, to deny the stories told by the scoundrel who so foully lied on me the other day, here in your presence."

A sneer curled Mayport's lip.

"Why didn't you make him take 'em back, then? When a man lies on me, I make him swallow his falsehoods. I run the slander down his throat, right then and there! That's the way I do!"

"You forget the circumstances, colonel!" Hill urged. "He had me foul! What could I have done, under the circumstances? To have moved would have brought my death! I did tell him, to his teeth, if you remember, that what he was saying was a lie!"

"And while you were so telling him your face showed he was speaking the truth! Mere words don't count with me, but evidence like that does!"

Hill squirmed and knew not what argument to advance next.

He had not been invited to a seat, but he now slid into the nearest chair, and chewed fiercely at his mustache, while his eyes glittered and his hands trembled.

"Will you believe me, Colonel Mayport, when I assure you, on my solemn word of honor, that I am innocent of the things that were so boldly charged against me? Innocent of them, every one?"

An ominous scowl sat on Mayport's brow.

And how worn and broken he seemed at that moment! Even Jep Hill, absorbed in his own interests, could not help noticing it.

Colonel Jackson Mayport had aged more in the few days that had elapsed since the beginning of his present troubles than he had aged in a dozen years before!

"If the colonel don't drop down, one of these days, with paralysis, or heart disease, or something of the kind, then I'm no prophet!"

This was the thought that flitted through Hill's mind, as he eyed the colonel and asked those questions.

"I'll not believe anything you say!" the colonel growled. "Not a word; do you hear? Not a word! You're a scoundrel, Jep Hill! I firmly believe that you're at the bottom of everything that's happened here lately! So you needn't come whining back here, thinking I'll stick to that will, and take you into the family fold again, and all that!"

"I'll have to tell you that I'll do nothing of the kind; and, if you're wise, you'll get your feet off this plantation as quick as you know how!"

As he spoke his anger increased, until his voice shook and his eyes blazed.

"But I want to assure you, Colonel Mayport, regardless of money considerations, that I'm not the villain you think me! I want—"

"And I want you to get out of this house, Jep Hill!" Mayport roared, suddenly losing all control of his temper. "I won't hear any more of your blathering! You're a liar, and the truth isn't in you!"

He rose to his feet, in his excitement, and pointed a shaking finger to the door.

"You'll live to regret this, Colonel Mayport!" Hill avowed, in a hurt voice, as he got out of the chair and picked up his hat.

"You are doing me gross injustice; and the time will come when you'll say so, yourself. Until that time comes, good-by, and good-morning!"

He placed his hat on his head, and went slowly out through the corridor and down the stairway, and, though his heart was on fire and fiercest anger ran riot in his veins, he smiled and laughed, as the servants gathered about him, and led them to think that his interview with Mayport had been of the pleasantest character.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNFORTUNATE FORTUNATUS.

WHEN Hill had talked and laughed with the negroes of the plantation for a few minutes, he announced his intention of returning to the city by the first steamboat; then Richmond approached and drew him aside.

"I jes' want to tell you, marse, 'fore you go 'way, dat dat no-count nigger, Uncle Forch, am de man what help young miss to git away f'um de plantation. On'y heard it jes' now, while you wus er-talkin' to de cunnel; an' I 'lowed dat wus 'sumpin' you'd lack to know!"

Hill leaped at the suggestion held by this information. If Fortunatus had conveyed Fannie to the city perhaps he might be able to tell of her present place of abode; he even might be in constant communication with her.

"An' dere's another thing," said Richmond, anxious to gain the good will of Jep Hill. "I reckoned mebbe f'um dat, dat Unc' Forch likewise done tuck dat misable spoat, Misteh Scales, to de city! If you'll 'vestigate a little, I mos' know you'll fin' dat to be a fac'!"

Jep Hill started so violently that Richmond thought he was immensely pleased and continued to pour other theories into his ears.

"I'll see Uncle Forch before I leave the plantation!" Jep promised. "Thank you, very much, Richmond, for what you've done for me. Just keep your eyes and ears open; and everything you see or hear that you think may be of interest to me, store it away, and tell me about it, when I come again!"

Richmond was delighted with this commission, and even more delighted when Jep Hill slipped another coin into his palm.

"I'll 'member dat, Marse Hill! You can 'pend on it dat I'll 'member, an' I'll watch dat no-count Unc' Forch lack a hen hawk watches a pullet!"

Jep Hill thanked him again, impressed on his mind the necessity of keeping a still tongue concerning this talk, and then slipped away through the woods toward the cabin inhabited by Fortunatus and wife.

He found Uncle Forch at home, the negro having just come in from the woods, with an ax on his shoulder. As for Mrs. Fortunatus she was down by the river, up to her eyes in a blackberry patch, and fairly milking the ripe berries from the laden briers.

"I want to have a few words with you, Uncle Forch!" Hill began, in a tone that was unpleasantly suggestive.

The negro tossed the ax into the wood-pile and waited for what was to be said.

"I hears you, marse!" he affirmed, when there followed an unpleasant silence.

But the fear that shone in his eyes did not indicate that he held for Hill the kindly feelings that had been manifested by Richmond.

"I've been told that you took Miss Fannie to New Orleans, when she went away; and that you also took Winthrop Scales there!"

Fortunatus twisted uneasily and began to dig one of his great bare toes into the sand.

"What have you to say about that?" Hill demanded.

"Who been tellin' you ya'ns like dem, Marse Hill?" the negro asked, striving to gain time in which to think. "Dat's what I'd lack to know! Who been a-tellin' you fings lack dat?"

"They're so, aren't they? Don't beat round the bush, Unc' Forch, but speak up honestly! They're so, aren't they?"

"Dey ain't so!" declared Uncle Forch, deciding to boldly lie out of it. "I hain't done tuck nobody to de city. Dat's what I hain't!"

"You didn't take Miss Fannie there?"

Fortunatus shook his head negatively.

"Nor you didn't take Winthrop Scales there?"

Again was given that negative shake.

"You are lying, Uncle Forch! I can see

that, as plain as day! Do you know what I do to a nigger when he lies to me? I make him willing to speak the truth."

As he said this, Jep Hill very deliberately drew out his knife and as deliberately cut a switch with it.

Uncle Forch retreated toward the cabin, eying these ominous preparations with evident alarm.

"I will make him willing to speak the truth!" Jep Hill asserted, advancing on him with the whip.

"Now, I ask you again, Uncle Forch, if you did not take those people to the city?"

The negro, who had backed up against the cabin, maintained a dogged silence.

Jep swept the whip whistlingly through the air, and brought it down on the shoulders of the negro with such force that drew a cry of pain.

"There's plenty more of that, if you don't speak the truth! Didn't you take Miss Fannie to New Orleans?"

Again the whip descended with stinging vim.

Fortunatus howled and writhed.

He did not try to retreat, nor did he seem to think of resistance.

"Answer my question!" threateningly.

Uncle Forch cowered, when he saw the whip again lifted in the air. He could endure no more. His courage failed him.

"Please, Marse Hill, doan' whup me in dat way!" he pleaded. "I'll tell de trufe, so help me! I did take Miss Fannie; but I didn't take dat man!"

"That's right!" and Hill nodded, approvingly. "You confess that you took Miss Fannie. Where did you leave her? Where is she now?"

To this Uncle Forch could give no satisfactory replies. He had left her in New Orleans; and, further than that he could not answer.

"Where did you leave that sport, then?" still questioned Hill, hoping to trip up the darky.

"I doan' know nuffin' 'bout dat man, Marse!" Fortunatus declared. "I nebber see dat man, 'ceptin' yere on de plantation!"

Jep Hill thought he was lying; and once more the whip sung through the air, and came down with cutting force on the negro's shoulders.

Hill lifted the whip again, but he did not deliver the intended blow.

He was checked by an angry voice and the click of a rifle-lock.

He turned quickly, and the gad dropped from his shaking fingers.

Before him he saw the man of all others he would rather not have seen at that moment and under those circumstances.

Colonel Mayport pointed a rifle at Hill's heart and seemed about to fire it.

Mayport's eyes were blazing with anger, and his hands shook so that it seemed he might touch the trigger unintentionally.

There was a look of murder in those blazing eyes; and Jep Hill, frightened as he had not been in many a day, leaped into some high bushes, that grew near the cabin, and disappeared.

And, as he leaped, the rifle belched its contents whether at the will of Colonel Mayport or through his nervousness could not be determined.

But the bullet failed to reach Hill, who ran like a deer out through the piney woods and on toward the river.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MASTER AND SLAVE.

ON firing that shot, which might have brought death to Jep Hill, Colonel Mayport dropped the rifle to the earth and fell in a dead faint.

Uncle Forch saw him reel, and sprang to catch him; but Mayport's head touched the ground before the slave could aid him.

The grief and horror of the black was uncontrollable.

He lifted the limp body, bore it toward the cabin, and there placed it on the earth, while heavy sobs rent his bosom.

He searched with groping fingers for some wound.

"I do b'lieve dat Marse Mayport done shot heself!" he ejaculated, searching vainly for the shot-hole.

Then, in spite of his fears of Jep Hill

he lifted his voice in a call for his wife, who was out berrying.

He need not have feared the return of Hill, for that rascal was making tracks for the river at his best gait.

But the old colored aunty did not hear her husband's call.

From a near-by cistern, Fortunatus procured a panful of water, with which he bathed his master's face, head and hands.

As a result of his frantic efforts, Colonel Mayport came back to consciousness.

The fire had gone out of his eyes; and, though he looked weak and limp, he managed to support himself by resting his back against the cabin wall.

"Did you done shoot youse'f, marse?" Fortunatus quavered.

"What has become of that scoundrel?" Mayport asked, not replying to the question.

"Marse Hill?"

"Yes! What's become of him?"

"He went off to'rds de river."

"And why was he whipping you?"

Fortunatus hesitated. He knew how bitter Mayport had been against Fannie and he feared the result, if he confessed that he had conveyed Fannie to New Orleans.

The planter's strength was coming back, though there was still a dazed look in his eyes, and from time to time he pressed a hand against his head.

"Why don't you speak up?" he commanded, with considerable irritation.

"You won't whup me, Marse Mayport?" Fortunatus pleaded.

"Not for telling the truth! But I'll certainly whip you if you tell me lies!"

"It was 'ca'se I didn't tell him where Miss Fannie done gone to, an' where dat spoat done gone to!"

A pained look overspread the face of the planter, as the name of his daughter was thus coupled with the sport.

"Do you know where they are?"

"No, marse!"

But Uncle Forch was melted by the hopeless and weak appearance of his master, at this juncture, and tremblingly confessed how he had, at Fannie's request, assisted her in getting to New Orleans.

Mayport's eyes lighted; new life seemed breathed into him, and he covered the black with a multitude of questions.

"If I could tell you where she done gone to, Marse Mayport, I would, sho! But I do know! She didn't know, herse'f! She say to me, she didn't know what in de worl' gwine to come of her! Dat what she say to me; an' she put her han's up to her eyes, dish yer' way, an' she cry lack she was des a little baby!"

Fortunatus may not have meant to take this course to weaken his master and make him kindly-affectionate toward his daughter, but it was a very effective way to accomplish that result, nevertheless.

Mayport was unable to control his feelings, or to hide them. His heart became a fountain of water, that overflowed in tears. He would have been ashamed of such an exhibition, at any other time, but he was so weak and nervous, now, and so utterly unstrung, that he heeded not the presence of the black.

"Oh, my poor girl!" he moaned. "My poor girl!"

Fortunatus listened to these exclamations with astonishment and delight.

"Ef on'y she could hear you say dat, marse!" he cried. "Ef on'y she could hear you say dat!"

"She shall hear me say that!" exclaimed Mayport, lifting his head. "I've treated her most inhumanly and unjustly. Perhaps I've driven her to ruin or death!"

He turned his wet eyes on the face of the black.

"Tell me again all that she said to you, while you two were going down the river," he requested. "I want to hear it all over! Was she very bitter against me? Did she ever say anything that hinted at suicide?"

Fortunatus obediently went over the story again, enlightening Mayport as much as he could.

He was so pleased, that he became garrulous in the telling, and dilated to an unlimited extent on unessential details, but every word he said was listened to with rapt interest by the planter.

"Uncle Forch, I'm going to New Orleans!" Mayport announced when Fortunatus had reached his conclusion.

"Bress God fo' dat, marsel!" Fortunatus shouted, clapping his hands.

"And you're going with me!"

Fortunatus's big mouth flew open, and he stared in stupid amazement. Then he caught the meaning of those words, in all their bearing, and flung his ragged hat toward the sky.

"Bress God!" he cried over and over.

"Bress God. We'll fin' young miss, even so be she am still a-livin', an' we'll bring her back to de ole plantation; and all dat's been done ag'in' her will be fergot, an' she'll sing 'round lack she used to! Bress God!"

Fortunatus was so happy he could hardly contain himself, and, as was his wont, he began to sing:

"Oh, de ole time 'ligion's good enough fer me!

De ole time 'ligion's good enough fer me!

De ole time 'ligion's good enough fer me!

Glory to de Lord!

Glory to de Lord!

Glory, bress his name!

I'll go up in a charyut ob fire!

Glory to de Lord!"

A smile rested on the worn face of Colonel Mayport and the tears stood again in his eyes, as he watched the caperings of the kind-hearted negro, and heard this enthusiastic outburst of song.

"We'll all sing Glory to the Lord when Fanny is with us again!" he asserted. "I was an idiot, Uncle Forch!"

Fortunatus bobbed his head in affirmation.

"I think I must have been suffering from a touch of insanity; but, if I live, I'll undo the wrong I've done her!"

"Bress de Lord!" Fortunatus shouted.

"Way out on de hills, dere was one lone chile!

Way out on de desert hills!

An' de King he say, 'we will bring her back;

Bring her back, bring her back to glory!"

"Oh, de paff she travel am a mighty hard paff,

But de backward way am a shinin' track!

De paff ahe travel am a mighty hard paff!

But she's comin' back, she is comin' back!"

Uncle Fortunatus was somewhat gifted in the line of song adaptation, and the old negro hymn, so familiar to the planter, was altered by him to fit the occasion.

Mayport was silent, until the singing ended.

Then he beheld Uncle Forch's better half amble from the shadow of the woods, with her bucket of berries poised on her head.

"Get ready to start with me to the city to-morrow! There'll be a steamboat down in the morning, and I'll have one of the boys pull us out to it in a skiff! We'll stay in New Orleans, you and I, until we find Fannie!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ANGEL OF THE TENEMENT.

"IMPORTANT!"

"A suitable reward will be paid for information leading to the discovery of the address or whereabouts of Miss Fannie Mayport, of St. James Parish, La., by her loving and sorrowing father. She is believed to be in New Orleans. Should she read this notice, let her rest assured that her father forgives everything, and acknowledges that in everything he was in the wrong. He humbly sues for her return!"

"(Signed) JACKSON MAYPORT."

This advertisement, which appeared in a prominent place in the *Daily Picayune*, met the eyes of a number of people with whom this story has had to deal.

Winthrop Scales, the Crescent City Sport, read it, in the reading room of the St. Charles Hotel, and forthwith stared about him to make sure he was unobserved, for the agitation that immediately possessed him was of an uncommon character.

His hands so shook that they rustled the

paper, and his face was ashy gray, while his eyes glittered.

When he was sure no one was near, or looking in his direction, he drew into a corner of the reading room, lifted the *Picayune* up in front of his face, to conceal its unearthly pallor, and re-read the notice.

It made several things plain to him:

Colonel Mayport had forgiven his daughter, and was seeking her return to the old home and the old relations. No doubt, Mayport was at the moment in New Orleans, searching for her; and, despairing of success, had published the notice.

"How his pride has been humbled!" was the sport's inward comment. "He is willing, in order to secure her return, to let the world see into the secrets of his heart; to publish his misery and shame to all mankind; and even to drag the name of his daughter into general notice! How he has changed!"

By looking into a mirror the sport might have observed that, so far as physical appearances went, he was probably quite as much changed as was Jackson Mayport!

He was, to some extent, aware of his altered looks. Constant and wearing solicitude and an unsuccessful search had left their marks on him.

"I'll have to look up the old gentleman!" was his reflection. "Maybe, together, we can find out where she went, when she disappeared so mysteriously before my very eyes! I'm glad he's forgiven her."

There was a wail in his heart, for the girl who had so thoroughly lost herself to friends and foes alike in the mazes of the city.

Another who read the notice in the *Picayune*, and was markedly affected by it, was the pretended Dutchman, Hannes Snickelfritz.

He was glancing, with scant interest, over the columns of the paper that drifted into his stall every morning, when his eyes lighted on Mayport's advertisement.

They opened very wide, and he puffed energetically at his long-stemmed pipe, as he took in the full meaning of those few lines in the *Picayune*.

"By shinks, dot bead me!" he ejaculated, blowing out a puff of smoke. "Dot bead me! I ton'd know vhat to make off id!"

At all times, and under all circumstances, the Hoosier Detective was consistent in the character he, for the time, assumed. As Hannes Snickelfritz he was always a German, in speech, look and action. Never was he an Irishman or a Frenchman, or his original self.

When he was garbed and disguised as a negro roustabout, he was nothing but a negro roustabout, no matter what the temptation to throw off the disguise.

In that way, he was seldom suspected; his disguise was seldom penetrated.

Now, even though the provocation was great, he stared at the paper, with Dutch gravity, and muttered away, in his assumed Dutch dialect, knowing that the man in the next stall had ears to hear and eyes to see, and might be using those ears and eyes when least dreamed of.

He read and re-read the notice, trying to determine just the mental state of Colonel Jackson Mayport when it was written, and pre-figuring the result of the search on which Mayport had entered.

It seemed very likely, he thought, that the notice would be seen by Fannie and that it would draw her back to the old home.

He sincerely hoped such would be the result.

Still another who read it was Jepley Hill! The reader recalls how hastily Hill departed from the plantation, with the smoke of Mayport's rifle enveloping his coat-tails.

He had not lingered about the place; not for a moment.

And now he was again in New Orleans.

And more, he was seated, at the moment of the reading, in the luxuriously-furnished apartments of one of the swell clubs of New Orleans.

He had once been a member of that club—for anything he knew to the contrary, he was still a member! He had not come, however, to the club-rooms as of right, but through the introduction of a friend.

And he sat there in disguise, as he turned the paper over;—so thoroughly disguised that those with whom he had once played

billiards and smoked and drank, passed him by without recognition.

He did not want to be recognized, for a variety of reasons, which need not be recalled, as the reader will recall, for himself, many of them. It was not exactly healthy, at that time, for him to appear openly in the Crescent City!

The friend who had introduced him under an assumed name to certain members of the club, that he might there sit and smoke and have the quiet the room afforded, as well as the security, was a member of the band of river pirates that acknowledge the head-ship of Jepley Hill.

He was a member who still retained his place in society, his crimes all undreamed of.

The security of the club was one of the things thought much of by Jep Hill. The Hoosier Detective would never think of looking there for him. Nor would the other men, lately so anxious to see him, peep into the recesses of the club's apartments for any such purpose as ferreting out a criminal; for the club was composed of men who were eminently respectable and aristocratic, of men who were too rich to pilfer and steal and play the bandit role.

"Deucedly strange how the old man has whopped around!" Hill mused, as he scanned the notice. "Deucedly strange! I would never have dreamed of such a thing!"

A little shiver ran through his frame, as he recalled the nearness with which that murderous bullet had come to cutting the cord of his life. He had heard the bullet's sharp whistle and had felt its wind on his neck.

It had been an uncommonly and unpleasantly close call!

It made the scoundrel shudder and shake, whenever its memory came strongly on him.

"The colonel must have lost his head completely! To think of him acting in that way! And I thought I had his fortune snugly in my pocket! It's the luck of the world, a curse on it!"

Then he shook again and his face paled a trifle, when he turned from a contemplation of the advertisement to what was printed in the adjacent columns.

The dreaded scourge, Yellow Jack, was beginning to ravage the city, and in the list of names of its victims he saw some that were familiar. One was the name of a young man he had once counted a friend.

The list was a long one and a ghastly one, a veritable death-roll. And just then Jepley Hill did not want to think of death!

But the one for whom the advertisement was intended did not read it at all. She did not see it! A daily paper was too much of a luxury to be indulged in by one in such needy circumstances.

And if any of her acquaintances in the big building read the notice in the *Picayune* they did not think of calling her attention to it, for the great and all-sufficient reason that she was not known to them as Fannie Mayport, but as Fannie Gaston.

While the notice was being read by the detective, and by Hill, and by the sport, and Fannie's father was walking dejectedly away from a certain police station, whither he had gone to make inquiries, Fannie was sitting in her little room, debating whether she should treat herself to some extras, in the way of food, that morning, or use the money required for their purchase in buying something for some of the sick inmates of the house.

It was an overgrown tenement building, filled, to the point of suffocation, by toiling men, women and children.

The dreadful heat had been making serious inroads on them, even before the terrible fever appeared. After that, they seemed to succumb by wholesale.

The big tenement was now little less than a hospital and a pest-house. Only the day before, two persons had been borne from it to their last resting-places.

There was no one so tireless, in season and out of season, as Fannie Mayport. She was the angel of the tenement! There was no other hand that seemed to have so cooling an influence. Whenever it pressed a hot and unconscious brow, the fever appeared to be driven back and the brain to clear.

She was everywhere, throughout the house, unselfishly giving her time and her hard-earned means.

But her money was almost exhausted! It had been so little! In the old times, the amount she now spent on herself each day would have been considered altogether too trifling for notice.

"I need a little tea!" she thought, as she sat staring out of the window and pressing a tired hand to her tired head. "What is it I don't need? And there is that sewing to be sent home, this evening! And, now, Mrs. Jones is down, and calls for me all the time!"

She glanced at herself, in the little mirror that hung against the wall, and wondered when her room-mate would return.

They were inseparable friends, she and this room-mate, whom she had known so short a time.

"I'm afraid I'm taking the fever!" she thought, as she looked at her flushed face.

She fancied that her skin was hot and parched and that her eyes were taking on a yellow tinge.

"It will not much matter! Mrs. Jones, and those like her, will miss me; that will be all!"

She sighed. She knew the poor people mentioned were not all who would miss her. There was Winthrop Scales! Yes, and there was her father, even though he had turned her from his door.

She decided she would not purchase the tea, that morning; but would devote the small sum she had thus thought of spending, in procuring something for Mrs. Jones.

Having reached this decision, she called to a slatternly girl across the hall, and hurried her off for the articles she fancied Mrs. Jones would relish; and then went, herself, to Mrs. Jones's room.

There was no quarantine in those days, such as is familiar now whenever Yellow Jack rages; so that people went to and fro in the city—in all parts of it—and there was even communication between New Orleans and other places without.

Mrs. Jones turned her fever-filled face on the girl that slipped so quietly into the room and murmured her thanks.

"Heaven will bless you and repay you, Miss Gaston!" said the poor woman. "I'm a great trouble to you, I know; but, somehow or other, no other hand feels just like yours, to my poor head!"

It was clear to Fannie that the woman was rapidly growing worse.

"I will stay by you!" she promised. "And I'll send out again and see if we can't get a doctor!"

"You're an angel!" the woman muttered, drowsily, apparently on the point of dropping into a sleep.

"If it was only poor useless me, now, instead of this woman, who has so many dependent on her earnings!" Fannie thought, as she set about her ministrations. "This is truly a dreadful time for us all! I wonder if the fever is spreading out toward St. James parish? I shouldn't want father or any of the folks out there, to get it!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A TRAP FOR GANDERFOOT.

FROM the screen of a high window, Jep Hill gazed down into the busy street.

But his thoughts were not on the men moving there. He saw, without observing, and caught sounds that he did not really hear. His face plainly revealed his mental abstraction.

It was not a pleasant face to look on, just then, even though it was undisguised. The imprint of villainy was too clearly stamped on it.

"A thousand curses on them both!" Hill growled, his features working strangely and murderously. "They've hounded me long enough. I won't stand it any longer, now that I know where to strike!"

The high window, from which he looked, was in the home of the friend whose good offices had secured him admission to the privileges and security of the club-rooms. It was a handsome house, and evidenced the wealth of its owner. Assuredly, no one looking at it would have dreamed of the character of that owner; that he was, by instinct, a thief of the worst sort!

The detective, Gabe Ganderfoot, and the sport, Winthrop Scales, had been crowding

Jep Hill altogether too closely for his comfort and peace of mind.

His subordinates had watched for them and tried to locate them.

Twice Hill had seen the sport and the detective; and a thousand things had occurred to show him that they were raking the city for him, to arrest him.

All of this had, of course, kept him very close—so close that his health was suffering. He hardly dared venture out, except during the hours of night.

But now—that very night—information of the whereabouts of the detective and the sport had been furnished.

It was known positively that the sport was stopping at the St. Charles; and that Ganderfoot was none other than the professed Dutchman of the French Market.

Scaley Castro had done this clever bit of detective work, in the interest of his master.

It had not required abilities of a high order to find the sport, who came and went openly; but the task of running down the detective was really a feat of which Scaley had just reasons to be proud.

"I'll go for them, now that I know where to strike!" Hill muttered, shifting uneasily. "I can't afford to have a pair of such bloodhounds barking at my heels. I can't afford to, and I won't!"

He chewed vigorously at the cigar he had been smoking, biting it as savagely as if it were one of these dreaded foes.

The shadows of evening were drawing on, and here and there a point of light began to flicker in the street.

Hill looked at his watch; and then closed it, with a snap.

"That's what I'll do!" he averred, with sudden viciousness.

Then he got out of his chair, took down a heavy hat that he could draw over his eyes as a semi-disguise, changed his coat for a rougher one, and descended to the street.

He looked cautiously about, before opening the street door and letting himself out.

Then he slouched the hat forward over his eyes, and stole away in the direction of the levee.

As he neared it, he headed for the wharf where the oyster boats congregate.

There were a number of these oyster boats, sloops and schooners, gathered there, as usual; and Hill went aboard of one, without a moment's hesitation.

It was not the one that Ganderfoot had boarded in the guise of the negro; though it resembled it in almost every essential. But these oyster boats look so much alike that one who is not up in boatology may well be pardoned for confounding one with another.

The oysters were nearly all out of it, though it still reeked with the odors. In spite of this, Hill disappeared in its depths.

He found a negro there.

"Where's the rest of the fellows?" Hill demanded.

"Dunno, boss!"

"Well, I guess we can work it alone! You go out and get some one to run an errand for me!"

The negro had a particularly malevolent face. It was not black. Rather, it was of a dirty brown, with freckled patches showing over it above one eye a huge bunch of flesh stood up like an incipient horn; the little eyes were red and piggish, and the features had a brutish appearance.

The negro disappeared, as soon as he received Hill's order, and then Hill began to look about.

When the negro returned, he had, apparently, perfected his plans.

A dirty-faced boy stood at the negro's side. Hill came up on the deck, his hat still pulled over his eyes, and scanned the boy narrowly.

He had seen the boy frequently, had sent him on numerous errands, and felt that the urchin could be trusted.

"Do you know the stall of that Dutchman, in the French Market?" he inquired, disguising his voice.

The boy nodded an affirmative.

"I want you to go there and tell the Dutchman that I've got a fine lot of oysters here, which I wish he'd come and look at. I'm going to sell 'em out cheap; and I think he'll be glad of the bargain!"

The boy tipped his ragged hat.

"Yes, sir! I'll go straight there!"

Hill had him repeat the purport of the message, and, when this was done correctly, he slipped a small coin into the lad's hand.

"You needn't come back, yourself; just send the Dutchman here!"

The boy vanished, almost instantly; and again Hill went below.

Scarcely had he disappeared, when Scaley Castro came aboard.

He was familiar with the boat, and did not hesitate in his movements. Like Hill, he vanished below; and soon the sounds of their voices, in low conversation, reached the ears of the negro.

"I think we're ready for him!" the negro heard Hill assert. "I intend to do him up; and then I'll tackle that infernal sport! It's come to that! Either I'll do them up, or they'll do me!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

GANDERFOOT IN THE TRAP.

GABE GANDERFOOT was sitting in his little stall, as usual at that time of day, when the messenger from Jep Hill hurried into the French Market, and sought him out.

At Ganderfoot's side sat the boy, Bob Bream.

Bob Bream was listening to some talking in progress in the adjoining stall, and Ganderfoot had just ceased trafficking with a garrulous old woman who wanted double quantity for every penny expended.

It had been an uneventful day to the Hoosier Detective. There had absolutely nothing occurred to stir him into a moment's interest, aside from the increasing ravages of the fever, and the daily gossip in the columns of the *Picayune*.

It had been a day of great heat, and Ganderfoot was well worn out, and was thinking of closing up the stall and returning to his boarding house, when Hill's messenger approached and delivered the message that Hill had put into his mouth.

Bob Bream pricked up his ears, metaphorically, when he saw the boy and heard his words.

Bream did not know the messenger, but there was something in his face and figure that caused the young spy to suspect him.

The call from the oyster-boat was nothing out of the common run. Almost daily some one came to Ganderfoot, asking him to go here or there for the purpose of examining a bargain in oysters, in oranges, bananas, or something else in which he dealt.

So that there was nothing in the call of itself to arouse Bob Bream's distrust, unless it was the hour in which it came. Such calls generally came in the morning.

Ganderfoot was on the point of telling the messenger he could not look at the oysters that night, when he caught the queer look in the face of Bob Bream.

He studied it for one brief moment, then turned to the messenger.

"Dell dhose vellers dhot I'll be dhene in yoost a couple uff minids. Yoost as soon as I can vix dhese t'ings here so dhot I can leave 'em; do you hear?"

"I wus told I needn't come back to the boat!" said the boy, who was longingly gazing at a bunch of greenish-hued bananas.

Again the eye of the detective sought the eye of Bob Bream, and again he saw the queer look he had previously noted.

Ganderfoot wanted to get rid of the messenger that he might have an opportunity to question Bob, so he pulled a banana from the bunch, and the boy, delighted with this mark of favor, hurried away.

"Vhot you d'hink uff dhot, eh?" Snickelfritz whispered, bending low, near Bream, and pretending to arrange a tray of oranges.

"You d'ink dhot vhasn't straight, eh?"

"I don't know what to think!" Bob Bream whispered back. "That boy is a rogue, and the way he delivered that message, made me think he knew there was something wrong about it! But, maybe I was mistaken!"

Snickelfritz seemed lost for an instant in thought.

"Uff she vhasn't all straight, unt vhat you calls correed, I reckon petter I go meppe unt see vhat id mean! Uff dot oysder poat vhas not all righd, petter I fount 'd oud!"

He climbed rheumatically to his feet, and began to bargain and scold, almost im-

mediately, with a mulatto girl, who came to buy some oysters.

But his mind was evidently busy, through it all, with the new ideas that had been injected into it, for, when the girl was gone, he bent down and again whispered to the boy.

"I'm going to dhot oysder poat! Meppe id is all righd, unt meppe it ain'd! Uff I ton'd gid pack here in an hour vrom now, you yoost go straight away to de bolice headquarters unt dell vhat you know; unt, afder dhot, you yoost go straight to dhot St. Charles Hodel unt pud a vlea into dhe ear uff dot Crescent City Sbor! You understand?"

"I understand!" Bob replied, opening his eyes very wide. "But, why take a risk, if you feel that way?"

"Id may bay me; you pet! Uff id don'd, you know vhat to do!"

The Dutchman's preparations were not tedious. He got out his big pipe, stuffed the bowl with tobacco, and lighted it, and then set out for the levee.

His movements were very deliberate, and one would not have dreamed that so active a brain sat above that seemingly sluggish body.

As he walked, he puffed at his long, Dutch pipe.

Yet, slow as were his steps, he reached the levee in a comparatively short space of time, as it was not far distant.

The negro stood there to meet and welcome him; and thrust out a gang-plank by which he reached the deck.

"A vine day!" Snickelfritz grunted, blowing an immense volume of smoke through his nostrils. "It been pooty hot t'rough dhe day, but id vas mighdy nice oud here dis efening, you pet me! Dhot vint plowing off dhe vater make me dthink uff dhe Rhine!"

The negro had probably never heard of the classic German stream, but he nodded and bowed, as he chimed in:

"Fines' evening, boss, dat I see in a good w'ile! Dish yer' ole Mississip' stir up a good 'eal o' win' on a hot night, sometimes!"

"Dhot ish so! Dhot ish so!" the Dutchman affirmed. "Where is dhot man's vhat haf those oysders to sell? I vhas tolt dhot a man's haf fine oysders do sell py dhis poat, so sheap dhot I couldn't help puying uff him!"

"Jist walk down that there way, boss! The cap'n's below; an' the oysters, too. You'll fine him down there, an' de bes' oysters you ever socked yer teef into! Dey is jes' jolly good oysters!"

He was so anxious and so nervous that the detective would have noticed his manner, even if he had not been looking for something of the kind.

For an instant Ganderfoot hesitated, and was on the point of turning around and retracing his way. But he exceedingly disliked to show the white feather; and, besides, there was the possibility that he was unduly suspicious, made so by the comments of Bob Bream.

He wished, though, that he had sent for the St. Louis Sport, before making his present venture. The sport could have stood out in the darkness on the shore, and brought the police down on the oyster boat if occurrences warranted it.

It was, however, too late to think of such precautions, or to worry because he had not taken them.

"Ali righd!" he said, in answer to the negro.

Then he held his pipe in one hand and dropped the other hand carelessly into a coat pocket, where it rested on a pistol.

A light swung, smokingly, to direct him, and he proceeded cautiously down, in the course pointed out by the negro.

He did not see the figure crouched near, for the figure was hidden by the shadows and by a piece of heavy timber.

It held a heavy billet of wood, poised for the purpose of striking down the pretended Dutchman.

The figure was Jep Hill, and he was trembling even more violently, and was more solicitous concerning the outcome of this decoy game, than was the negro.

Very much depended on it, from Hill's point of view. It was a thing he could not afford to fail in. Failure, in such an act, would mean a great deal.

And Jep Hill had fully made up his mind to kill Gabe Ganderfoot and let the surging flood of the great river conceal the evidences of the crime.

But for the dashing of the waves against the boat's side, Ganderfoot would have heard the deep breathing of the would-be murderer, as he crouched thus in the shadows.

But suspicious and careful as the detective was, he passed Jep Hill and walked on.

Then Hill arose, tip-toeing and silently, and swung the heavy billet.

For a moment it hung poised above the detective's head.

Then it descended, with crushing force, and the pretended Dutchman sunk down, unconscious.

Jep was sure he had killed the detective, for the blow had been truly terrific. A terror paralyzed him, after that; and held him shaking and palsied in his tracks, not daring to glance down at the dark outline of the figure stretched at his feet.

Not a groan, nor a sound, came from the lips of the stricken man, who lay as senseless as the timbers about him.

With an effort, Hill shook off the paralysis that chained him, but could not bring himself to examine the form at his feet to make sure of the thoroughness of his diabolical work.

On the contrary, he fled to the deck; and there, in a shaking voice, issued his orders.

Sealey Castro and the negro were there together, now, to do his bidding.

"I've killed him!" Hill whispered. "But, to make everything sure, and cover our tracks, we'll drop out into and down the river, and there we'll dump him over to the fishes!"

"Keep still as you can! Some one may have heard that blow! If we're taken, we're all in for it; and we'll all hang together!"

The rascals were prompt in their promises of secrecy, quiet and obedience and sprung to the work in hand, with surprising alacrity.

The ropes that held them to the wharf were stealthily cast off, a pole shoved against a timber, and the oyster boat slowly and silently drifted out into the current.

Night had overspread the city and the levee was deserted by all, save a few loungers, and these were giving no heed to the oyster boats.

The boat moved with distressing slowness, so slowly in fact that one on shore would scarcely have thought it moving at all; but it finally caught the full force of the river's current, and floated away, as if it had accidentally slipped its cables and gone adrift.

That it had done so was the idea that Jep Hill and his companions wished to create!

CHAPTER XXVII. OVERBOARD!

HILL was so terror-stricken, and so fearful lest the foul crime committed should meet discovery, that, though he hardly dared venture near the silent figure, he took up a tarpaulin and tossed over it, thus hiding it from sight.

When he had done this, he breathed easier. He knew there was blood on the floor, though; and, when, a moment later, by the light of a lantern, he discovered that his feet had trodden in that blood, and that it had stained his shoes, he was charged with new fears and shook like a leaf.

He stared at the blood as if it was the brand of Cain!

"Go down and get me that old pair of shoes you saw me wear the other day!" he commanded the black. "I'll toss these overboard! I won't dare to wear them again!"

He slipped the shoes from his feet, and was on the point of throwing them into the water, when he checked himself.

"They'd be picked up and identified as my shoes!" he shivered. "No, that won't do! I must get rid of them in some other way. What a fool I was to be so careless! The stain will be hard to get off."

The stain of blood on his soul did not trouble him. What he dreaded was a physical punishment, not the injury done his own nature.

The negro returned with the discarded pair of shoes, as requested, but Jep did not immediately put them on.

On the contrary, he went below, to where there was a rusty iron stove. Some coals still burned in this, which he roused to new life; and then, adding more fuel, he removed the stained shoes from his feet, tossed them into the stove, and stared at them as they crisped and burned.

"A fool again!" was his thought. "I wonder if I didn't leave stains at every step, as I came down here? I ought to have thought of that!"

In spite of the heat of the stove and the stuffy condition of the confined space, he was aware that he was shivering cold. His face felt pinched, his hands icy, and his teeth chattered as if he were freezing with an ague.

The negro had quietly followed him with the old pair of shoes; and these Hill now put on his feet.

"How far are we down the river?" he asked.

"Half a mile er so, boss," said the black. "We gwine down at a tol'able good gait, now."

"Are we edging toward the other shore?"

"Not berry fast. Current hain't a-castin' us dat way es much es I'd lack."

"Get out that big oar, then," Hill commanded, "and see what you and Castro can do toward putting us across the river. You might run up a bit of sail, too. There's a wind blowing. It would be safe, wouldn't it?"

His eyes were so starry and his features so drawn that the negro, who was inclined to superstition, was more than half-frightened at his appearance.

"Hope you ain' gwine ter hab a fit, or nothin' lack dat, boss! You look lack you was tuck wid sumpin' terrible!"

Hill straightened himself, with an effort.

"Do what I tell you!" he cried. "Go on deck and get out that big sweep; and put up a little sail, if you think it's safe! I'll follow you in a minute!"

The black seemed glad enough to hasten from his presence; and, when he was gone, Hill continued to stare into the fire at the burning shoes, and did not remove his gaze until they were entirely consumed.

Then, as he staggered to his feet, that ashy pallor still on his face, he was startled by a low exclamation from Castro.

Castro's tone told him there was something wrong, so he ran quickly on deck, giving a guilty glance at the form of the detective as he passed it.

Castro and the negro had hoisted a sail, and were trying to run toward the other bank of the river, though they had not yet got out the sweep to help them along. But, as there was a fair breeze blowing, it was not likely they would need the aid of the sweep.

The exclamation that had been brought from Castro's lips did not concern the management or the progress of the boat, but was drawn by the sight of a tug that was coming down the river, apparently straight toward them.

As soon as Hill reached the deck he saw the tug, and would have seen it, even if his attention had not been drawn to it by Castro.

"What do you make of it?" Hill asked.

It's outline was barely visible, owing to the darkness, but the fire that shone from its furnaces, and flamed out the top of its one big funnel, made its position plainly visible, and told its character.

"Do you suppose it's a police boat?" Hill continued, before Castro or the black were given time to reply.

His fears were fresh and strong. He thought of the detective, lying in blood below, with only that tarpaulin to hide him and the traces of the crime; and he thought of the blood-stains that had so recently troubled him. And, thinking thus, Hill shook again, as if chilled.

Frightened as Hill was, he would have been still more frightened if he had known of the message that had been left by the pretended Dutchman with the boy, Bob Bream. Had he known of that, he would have been sure the tug was in charge of pursuing police officers.

"Pile on a little more sail, but be quiet about it!" he urged. "Here, both of you, jump lively; and I'll take the helm!"

This he proceeded to do; while Castro and

the black hoisted another bit of dirty canvas to the wind.

The effect was instantly perceptible. The oyster boat drew ahead and began to move through the water at a more promising pace.

"Pile on a little more!" Hill ordered, his hands busy, while his eyes watched for the darkly-seen, distant shore, and turned again and again toward the tug. "I don't really believe that fellow is following us, after all!"

His hopes were growing, for his close observation of the tug showed him that she was not maneuvering as if in pursuit. She was keeping straight down the river.

The oyster boat, driven ahead by the increased sail, crossed the center of the river and headed for the opposite bank.

Hill's dread, now, was that the name of the oyster boat might be read, or some peculiarity about her marked by the eyes of those on the tug by which she might afterward be identified.

He could not rid himself of the feeling that trouble of some kind was yet to come out of the murder of the detective; for he knew that the Crescent City Sport would leave no stone unturned to ferret out the authors of the crime.

But he intended to serve the sport in a manner similar; so that the sport could not do much to bring the crime home.

How active Hill's mind was! His brain seemed on fire, and a thousand thoughts and conjectures flashed through it. It was as if he had stimulated it with strong wine.

Five minutes more served to show him, to his great gratification, that the tug was not pursuing the oyster boat; was not giving it any heed. Oyster boats were such common things that it is quite possible no one on the tug gave it a second glance.

Hill watched the tug earnestly, as it steamed down the river, sending forth those vicious little puffs and showering the night air with sparks. And he breathed freer, when it rounded a point below, and he knew, to a certainty, that its mission in no way concerned him.

The vicinity of the further bank of the river was gained by the oyster boat, shortly afterward; and then Hill and his confederates had before them the disagreeable task of throwing overboard the body of the man they had murdered.

Hill shrank from it, visibly, but there was no help for it.

The oyster boat was permitted to drift slowly down the river, while preparations for the dark deed went forward.

Not until everything was in readiness, was the tarpaulin removed from the detective. The leather thongs were prepared and the weight of iron for the feet was at hand.

The form of the pretended Dutchman was revealed by the light of a dirty lantern held in the shaking hand of the negro.

By the light of that lantern the men thus assembled looked little better than fiends. It cast an unearthly color over their faces and brought out the evil that was in them. The horn above the eyes of the negro stood out with ominous suggestiveness.

The light showed, too, the blood on the floor and the terrible wound in the head made by the descending billet of wood.

Hill, in spite of his shivering dread, knelt down and placed a hand above the detective's heart.

"Mebbe you'd better take off his disguises and see for sure it's the man we are after!" Castro advised.

But Hill did not want to see the face of the murdered man so badly as that, being sure he had not made a mistake; besides, he was startled half out of his wits by the discovery that the detective was not dead.

"His heart is still beating!" he cried, looking up startledly, into the faces of his companions.

His own face had grown more ghastly, if possible, than it had yet been, and the uncertain light cast on it gave it a horrible look.

"Stick a knife into it!" said Castro. "That'll stop it mighty quick!"

He felt his own heart thumping violently. "No! no!" and he shuddered. "I don't want any more blood spilled here in the vessel. There's nothing so hard to get out as blood-stains!"

It was but an excuse, this stated fear of the blood-stains; though he was quite right in saying such a stain is hard to remove. He could not bear to strike a blow with a knife, in the murderous way suggested.

His desire was to get rid of the detective in as short a time as possible. And, to do that, there was no easier method than to attach the irons to his feet and toss him overboard.

"We'll heave him over!" said Hill. "That will settle it, quite as well as any other way!"

"Correct!" said Castro, with a nod. "Heart won't pump a great while, under water!"

Castro was the coolest villain of the lot. Perhaps for the reason that he was more experienced in crime.

As for the negro, he shivered like a leaf, and seemed half on the point of permitting the lamp to drop to the floor. His brownish face had a dirty, greasy look; his eyes rolled redly in their deep sockets; and the horn seemed to stand straight out from his forehead, like the horn of some beast.

At the order of Hill, Castro knelt and fastened the irons to the detective's feet, securing them with the thongs of leather. The weight of iron was sufficient to hold him safely at the bottom of the river.

"He'll never come up, with that tied to him!" said Castro, as he arose from his task. "Now, help me here, and we'll soon have the job done. The sooner it's off our hands the better!"

Hill was of the same opinion; and Castro and the black carried Ganderfoot to the side of the boat, and there heaved him over into the water.

He struck the surface of the river, feet foremost, with a splash, and then slipped quickly out of sight, while the waters closed above him, showing but a few bubbles.

The deed was done!

The oyster boat drifted quickly away from the point; and Jep Hill, taking the helm, guided it in toward the shore.

It was his intention to lie there till morning; and then work back to the city, or signal for a tug, should the wind be light. He meant to pretend that his boat had slipped its cables, unobserved, and had drifted off there in the darkness. It would be a plausible story, and one which he thought would meet with a ready acceptance.

He knew it would require much time to properly remove the blood-stains, and he felt that that was a thing which must be done before venturing back to the city.

He hardly knew where the boat was, with reference to the shore he was approaching; but, by what seemed great good luck, he succeeded in working into a grassy cove, where they were not likely to be disturbed.

Then water was dipped up from the river, brushes and mops were brought out, and the task of removing the stains was begun by Castro and the black.

They got down on their hands and knees, while Hill held the lantern for them, and scraped and rubbed until every vestige of the tell tale color disappeared.

Then they piled a heap of oyster-shells and oysters, brought from the cook's room, over the place where the stains had been, and began to feel reasonably secure.

But the sense of uneasiness did not entirely leave Hill; and, though Castro was nonchalant enough, the superstitious negro fancied he heard voices calling to him out of the tumbling waters; and more than once startled from his sleep with a cry, thinking the blood stained face of the murdered man was leering into his.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN UNFRUITFUL CHASE.

On board a tug, early the next morning, heading down the great river, stood the Crescent City Sport, restless, wide-awake, uneasy.

He was searching for the Dutchman, Hannes Snickelfritz, or for those who might know what had become of him.

It began to look very much as if the murderers of the detective were to receive the speedy punishment they so richly deserved.

Bob Bream had been dutifully obedient. He had waited, with much impatience, in and about the French Market, the limit of time assigned him by Snickelfritz.

He had not wholly approved of Snickelfritz's movement. He felt that the detective's enemies were too tricky and desperate to risk much in obeying such calls. If it had been himself thus summoned, Bob Bream fancied he would have told the messenger he could not visit the oyster boat until the coming of another day.

Still, he could not be sure of just the course he would take in any peculiar emergency. He admired the detective, believing the latter a shrewd and capable man.

But, as the time crawled slowly by, Bob Bream's uneasiness grew, and, as soon as the last minute had sped, he left the French Market, and hastened with all speed to the nearest police station, where he rehearsed his story and his fears.

From the police station, he went to the St. Charles Hotel, in search of the sport; and found him there, without difficulty.

The Crescent City Sport was both interested and startled by the information that the boy brought, and forthwith left the hotel, in the boy's company, and went to the river front, where the oyster boats were gathered.

It was clearly seen that the boat to which the detective had been directed was not in its place. They did not know the name of this boat, but there was nothing in the oyster slip that answered to the description Bob Bream had heard delivered by the messenger.

A policeman crossed the street and came toward them. He was from the station that Bream had visited, and, as he was acquainted with the sport, the three drew aside for consultation.

The policeman had seen nothing about the levee of a suspicious character.

Other police officers were making search, also, but it was not thought their success was any greater than his.

Additional officers were soon after called to the work of hunting for the mysteriously-missing man, and the sport and Bob Bream boarded the police tug and began a search of the river.

While darkness remained, it was unfruitful; but now, steaming down the big river, the officers and men aboard the tug saw a large oyster boat, out in a shallow basin near the opposite shore.

They wondered if it were not the very boat they were looking for, and a subdued excitement reigned.

The tug was headed toward the oyster boat; and a little later a signal flag floated from the boat's mast-head.

The oyster boat wanted a tug, so the signal was interpreted.

This caused those aboard the tug to think they were mistaken after all, and that this was not the boat for which they were hunting.

But it was the identical boat to which the detective had been decoyed, and from which he had been thrown, with that weight of iron to his feet.

Aboard of it were the negro and Jep Hill. Scaley Castro had taken its one small boat, and had pulled back to the city, more than an hour before, and before the coming of day, for what reason was not apparent. It was connected, though, with the return of the boat to the city, and he carried a warning and a command to the river thieves.

Jep Hill did not at once suspect that the tug coming down the river was a police boat.

He was almost sure of it, though, when it headed in his direction. And, if he could have extricated himself from his unpleasant dilemma, he would have done it.

There was nothing to do but to leap overboard, or put on a bold front and assume an air of innocence.

He thought of the blood stains that had been so carefully scraped away and covered with shells and oysters, and decided the work had been so well done that there was really little cause for fear.

Then he hoisted the signal flag, resolved on assuming a bold course.

The tug came down in triumphant style, with the smoke streaming from her funnel, and the water foaming under her bows; and then Jep Hill saw the figure of the Crescent City Sport standing well forward on her deck. The sight quite took his breath.

For one brief moment he had serious

thoughts of springing over the rail and risking everything in the water, but he still had sense enough, in spite of his fright, to know that he could not reach the land before being overtaken.

The negro, watching him keenly, saw the terror in his face, and his own browned and horned countenance became likewise seamed with anxiety.

"What's de trouble, boss?"

"Winthrop Scales is on the tug, and I don't doubt he's coming to arrest us!"

"But he can't know what we done, boss!" the negro stoutly urged. "Nobody, so far ez we knows, see'd dat detective come on dis yer' boat! An' I'se sart'in sho' nobody see'd us w'en we th'owed 'im over!"

These facts, so plainly stated, came with bracing effect. Hill began to realize that his own fears were more likely to betray him than anything else, if he was not very careful.

"You're right!" he said, in reply. "Keep a stiff upper lip! If they ask you about the Dutchman, tell them he came on the boat last night, but didn't stay more'n a minute, and that you don't know what became of him after that!"

"Jes' ez you say, boss!" and the negro showed his teeth.

The tug was at hand, now, so rapidly had it moved through the water.

"Will you take us in tow?" Jep Hill called out, with assumed calmness, addressing those he saw on the deck of the tug. "We drifted away, last night, and the wind has not been good enough this morning, for us to get back!"

"A lie, brazenly told!" thought the alert young sport, as the words floated to him. "He thinks to pull the wool over our eyes!"

Nevertheless Scales was somewhat surprised to know that Hill was aboard the oyster boat and apparently in control of it.

He was quite certain that the rogue had no interest in the oyster trade, and his quick mind saw through the scheme against the life of Ganderfoot; and, though in error in details, he was correct in the one essential fact.

He went on board the oyster boat, with the captain of the tug and a few others—these last being police officers disguised as river men.

Jep Hill paled, when he saw the sport on the oyster boat. The presence of the young man, there, was ominous.

And he was not long in doubt as to the course of action the sport meant to pursue.

He approached Jep Hill in the most amiable way, smiling as if pleased at the meeting, and extended a hand in seeming greeting.

For an instant Jep Hill thought of refusing it, recalling, as he did so, strongly, the last time they had thus stood facing each other; but he could not well refuse, in the presence of those others, without showing his ill-feeling and enmity; so he stretched out his hand.

With wonderful celerity and strength it was gripped and held; and, before Hill quite comprehended what had occurred, one of the ununiformed officers at the sport's side had slipped a pair of handcuffs on Hill's wrists!

The captured man tried to break away, but Scales held him with an iron-like grip.

"You don't go, Jep Hill, until you tell what became of the man who came aboard this boat last night, summoned by a message from you! It was the Dutchman, who kept a stall in the French Market!"

"I know nothing about him!" Hill asserted, trying to bristle with indignation. "Take these irons off me, or you'll be made to suffer for it! What do you mean by this outrage?"

The negro had disappeared below but was now brought up by an officer, who had found him in hiding down there.

He was placed at Hill's side, though unbound, and asked to tell what had been done with the Dutchman.

He was shaking like a leaf, and his brown skin was of a dirty, greasy appearance. He was half-frightened out of his senses; and Hill very much feared he would be scared into revealing the crime in all its details.

But the negro, after glancing at his master, grew calmer and refused to confess any-

thing. He denied all knowledge of the thing charged, with a firmness that quite out-did the firmness of Jep Hill.

It began to seem that the sport was to make no discovery, after all!

"Search the boat!" he requested of the officer in charge. "Perhaps our friend may be hidden somewhere on it!"

In spite of this command, he was sure that Ganderfoot was not on the craft, and only hoped that, in making the search, something would be turned up to tell the story of the night.

He feared, more than ever, that Ganderfoot had been killed and his body hurled into the Mississippi, for he knew how desperate such a hunted man as Hill becomes, at times.

A cry drew his attention.

He turned from the prisoners and hurried below.

"Something suspicious the way them oysters is piled up there, don't you think?" the officer asked, pointing a finger at the pile heaped above the place from which the blood-stains had been scrubbed.

Hill heard the question, for it was not put in a low tone, and grew as pale as death; and the negro, with fears growing, began to cast about for some means of escape.

He saw he was not closely observed, for all eyes were turned in the direction of the voices; and, as he was not bound or handcuffed he slipped from Hill's side and disappeared aft.

The oyster-pile was removed, at the command of the officer, and the recent scrubbing and scraping was brought to light. Also, one tiny speck of blood, that had been overlooked by Hill and his confederates!

To the mind of the Crescent City Sport there remained not a shadow of a doubt that Gabe Ganderfoot had been decoyed on the oyster boat and there murdered.

He said as much, facing Jep Hill, a few moments later.

Hill shiveringly denied the charge, still claiming that he had not seen the pretended Dutchman from the French Market for more than a second or two, and that the oyster-pile had not concealed any indications of crime.

He alleged that a chicken had been killed for supper, which accounted for the blood-drop found, and that the oysters had been heaped there quite by accident, and without an intent to hide anything.

It was seen that the negro was gone from Hill's side, and a search was made for him through the boat, without avail.

As he was a good swimmer, it is probable that he dropped into the water from the stern of the boat, and by swimming and diving had made his way to the reeds along the shore.

A boat was lowered, and a squad of men sent to beat about in the grass along the river's margin, but they failed to find him, or any trace of him.

When it was plain that the black rascal had given them the slip, the tug and the oyster-boat were headed toward the city, the tug drawing the oyster-boat astern.

The prisoner most wanted—he who was manifestly the principal in the crime charged—was still a prisoner in the hands of the police; and the sport felt that he ought to be satisfied, even though the negro had escaped.

Resolved that Hill should not escape, in any such manner, the sport remained close to him throughout the trip up the river, ready to spring on and hold him if he showed any signs of an attempt to break away.

Hill seemed sullen and despairing.

He seemed to watch the shores narrowly, and to fix his eyes with much earnestness on every passing vessel, as if hoping help might come from some of them.

Though questioned, and not infrequently threatened, he continued to deny all knowledge of the Dutchman, and to assert that no one had been killed on board the oyster-boat during the hours of the night.

The sun was more than an hour high, as the tug and the oyster-boat approached the familiar wharves of the city.

The levee was lined with negroes and other laborers, and the roll and jar of heavy wagons sounded continuously.

The sport turned his eyes on the wharf; and, as he did so, Hill, who had been nar-

rowly watching for this opportunity, moved to the vessel's side.

They were at the moment near the cotton-wharf, where the Crescent City Sport had had his encounter with Ward Lewis.

In spite of the handcuffs that so hampered him, Hill leaped boldly from the boat, to the intense astonishment of all, and disappeared in the swiftly-flowing water.

The tug immediately hove to, and a boat was lowered for a search, while a close watch was kept for Hill's reappearance.

The lowered boat rowed round and round in a circle, for some time, but Hill did not come to the surface.

Whether drowned or not, no one could say; though the sport believed Hill still lived.

But he had escaped; and the work of those on board the tug was thus made fruitless.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN HIDING.

THE Crescent City Sport was quite right in his belief that Jepsey Hill was not drowned.

Hill knew perfectly well what he was doing, when he made that seemingly desperate leap from the tug.

He knew that the opening leading to the thieves' "den" was near at hand, and he felt sure he could reach it by swimming under water to the levee.

New Orleans lies very low, some portions of it even below the level of the river; and the levee is an artificial uplift of the river's banks, to keep the water from running into and flooding the city.

Such a thing as an artificial cave beneath one of the wharves was not, therefore, a thing to be expected. Any one would have thought that such a place would have filled with water and been uninhabitable.

It was well-nigh uninhabitable, and would never have been occupied by men who were not despairingly driven to seek its security. It was damp and unwholesome, filled with mold, and slimy with dripping water.

The timbers that braced it and kept it from tumbling about the heads of its occupants were rotten and insecure.

How it ever came into existence was something of a mystery, though those who were supposed to have knowledge on the subject said that a warehouse had once stood directly above it.

This warehouse, it was claimed, had come into the hands of one of the river thieves, who had constructed, with much stealth, the subterranean place now called the "den"—had roofed it in and made of it a very secure hiding-place, and had then burned down the warehouse for the insurance money.

In this way the police were never given anything on which to base even a supposition of its existence; and the den became the refuge of the band, to which they fled when hard-pressed, and where they had always found safety.

As soon as Jepsey Hill touched the water and felt himself sinking toward the bottom of the river; he struck out as well as he could for the shore, being careful to keep himself well submerged.

If he had not been an excellent swimmer, he could not have accomplished the task now undertaken by him with so much courage and assurance.

But he could disport himself in the water with the ease of a fish; and, even though his wrists were handcuffed, he succeeded in making some use of his hands. But he swam chiefly with his legs; and in a little while—only a moment—his head touched the mud, and he knew he was under the wharf.

Here he ventured to lift his head and get a breath of much-needed air.

He was in semi-darkness, as he remained prostrate on the mud and listened to the sounds that drifted to him.

The noise of the street and wharf drowned almost everything else; yet he heard the commands of the officers on the tug, and knew that a boat was rowing about in search of him.

He smiled grimly, feeling perfectly secure.

"They'll not find me in a hurry. I don't know but that was the very best trick I could have done. They'll not think of looking further!"

That he had been drowned was what he hoped would be believed, and thus his safety be increased. No one would think of searching through the city for a man who was supposed to be at the bottom of the river!

But Jep Hill did not give the sport sufficient credit for shrewdness.

When he had rested for a time, and listened without gaining further information, Hill crept on over the slime, till he came to the trap-door, through which Ward Lewis had gained admission on a somewhat similar occasion.

The door would not have been seen by eyes not looking for it, for it was of a dull, mud color, without anything to make it distinguishable from the mud banks around it.

As Ward had done, Jep Hill tapped softly on the door.

He was compelled to wait awhile for a reply, and nervously tapped again.

Then the door was slipped quietly, and a face was dimly seen, while there issued forth words of inquiry.

Jep Hill was able to give a satisfactory reply, and was admitted to the security of the "den" where his coming created something of a sensation.

He was dripping wet, and the story he told of his escape had in it such elements of danger and novelty that it drew the attention of all.

Of all save one! That one was incapable of thought—of hope or fear.

In one of the soggy berths lay a member of the band, tossing in the grip of the fever that was continuing to rage with increasing violence.

This member was Ward Lewis! Ward Lewis, who would never again look on the beauties of the outside world—would never again crack a safe or head.

Jep Hill was made acquainted with Lewis's condition and was much excited, as well as much alarmed. The presence of fever in the den was not a cheerful fact, of itself; and Hill hated to lose so valuable an aid and friend as Ward Lewis. It was clear to him that Ward Lewis was not long for this world.

"Every one of us will take the fever, if we remain in this hole!" he asserted, with anxiety. "It will have to be abandoned! A worse place could not possibly be found!"

But a large number of those seeking refuge there had previously had a tussle with Yellow Jack and were, in consequence, "immunized," as it is now called; and besides, there was no place they could go in safety, however much they wanted to escape from the pestilence that was developing in the noisome hole.

Some clothes that were partly dry were found for Jep Hill; and then he sat down with these confederates and began to discuss the danger they were all in, not only from the fever, but from the police.

It was feared by some that his escape from the tug, so near that point, might so direct attention to the vicinity that the den would be discovered. But others scouted the idea.

As for Hill, he assured the men that there was not the slightest peril from what he had done.

"Speakin' of that sport," said one of the men, when the talk began to lag, "reminds me of that girl you was so much int'rested in!"

Jep Hill gave a start.

"That Miss Fannie you was a-moonin' about to me, some time ago! I seen her! And I'm ready to gather in your ducats!"

"Where?" was Hill's eager question.

He described the house, which was a big tenement, on a little cross street, near Julia.

Hill listened, in a fever of impatience.

"There can't be any mistake about it, you think?"

"Not at all!" the fellow averred. "I was down at the plantation once with you, if you remember; and so I know her when I see her!"

"She didn't look sick?"

"Kind o' peaked and tired out!—tired waitin' fer you to call on her, most likely!"

The statement was made with a laugh.

Hill did not like the levity and familiarity, and frowned.

"I'll go and see her!" he declared. "I'll go and see her, this evening!"

"Do you think it'll be safe?" the man questioned, thinking if Hill emerged too

early from the den he might bring danger to the others hiding there.

"I'll not go out by the water route, but I'll be careful," Hill promised. "I've not done anything yet that the band couldn't approve of!"

A groan from Ward Lewis drew Hill to the side of the soggy cot.

"There must be some cleaner and dryer clothing got down here!" he said, speaking to those who crowded about him. "I'll get some, and have it left at the old place; and to-night some of you go there and get it! We must take care of each other—stand by each other, these times!"

Hill was really courageous, in a way. Though he had avoided the duel with the sport at the plantation, he could yet stand at the fever bed without a thrill, though he was not at all sure the dread scourge would not attack him next, in consequence.

While he was thus talking and advising, and doing what he could to make the sick man more comfortable, another member of the band entered the "den," with a story to tell.

The story concerned the negro, who had been with Jep Hill on the oyster-boat.

A further search of the reedy bank of the river, at the point where the black disappeared, had been made by the police. The black had been routed from his hiding-place; and, failing to obey the command to halt, had been fired on by them and killed.

His body had been brought back to the city, and the bearer of this startling bit of news had seen it and could not be mistaken.

Jep Hill expressed much indignation, and talked loudly about the crime of shooting the negro down in that way, yet he was secretly glad that the negro was dead.

He had feared that the negro, if taken, would be forced to tell all he knew and thus involve the entire band in ruin; now the negro's lips were sealed.

Jep Hill had not told these confederates, who were with him in the hole under the wharf, of the crime committed on board the oyster-boat in the darkness of the preceding night.

He did not want the knowledge of that crime to spread further than was necessary, or to be shared by many persons.

Scaley Castro knew it; and none other, since the death of the negro.

As the day slipped along, and Scaley still remained away, Hill began to fear that Scaley might have fallen into the hands of the police; but Scaley set these fears at rest by walking into the den, along in the middle of the afternoon.

Jep Hill drew him aside, at the first opportunity, and had a talk with him.

"I want you to go to our friend at the French Market, as soon as you can, and it's safe for you to do it, and have him claim the oyster-boat! It's without an owner, now, apparently. I want him to take it as his own, and hold it for me and for the band!"

Scaley nodded, for Scaley knew exactly what was wanted of him.

The Frenchman, who acted as a go-between for these river thieves, was to be asked to claim and hold the boat for them; Hill did not doubt the Frenchman would do it.

Scaley Castro vanished, soon after, on this mission; and, an hour or so later, Jep Hill began his preparations for a visit to Fannie Mayport.

He had spent a good deal of time, throughout the day, in thinking what he should do and say when he called on her.

Not until the lights flickered in the streets and darkness reigned in the obscure by-ways that he sought, did Jep Hill emerge from his place of hiding, and take his way in the direction of the street and the house where Fannie was said to dwell.

As he walked along, with hat drawn over his eyes, he heard news-boys calling the evening papers.

One of these boys came near, and was stopped by Hill, who purchased a paper.

In the shelter of a stairway and below a dim gas-jet, Jep Hill glanced hurriedly through the paper.

What he sought, he found: an account of the arrest and escape of himself from the tug, and of the death of the negro.

Many of the statements made by the paper concerning these exciting events were erro-

neous, as Hill knew, and the news was dish-ed up in a way to take the reader by the ears; but, in spite of their sensationalism, the accounts were reasonably accurate, and Jep Hill was made aware of the feeling on the subject and somewhat of the plans and hopes of the police.

He tossed away the paper, when he had read all he cared for; and again slouched forward in the direction of the shabby home of Fannie Mayport.

CHAPTER XXX.

HILL'S VISIT TO FANNIE.

FANNIE MAYPORT was sitting at the bedside of Mrs. Jones, slowly moving a palm-leaf fan to and fro, to stir into life the stagnant air that filled the heated little room.

Mrs. Jones was very much better—thanks to Fannie's nursing, and was on the high road to recovery.

But Fannie's appearance was even more worn and fagged than when last she was seen by the reader.

The toil by day and the vigils by night were telling on her. Never very rugged and robust, she was less so since her flight from her father's house.

She had summoned her strength to a battle that had gone against her from the first. That strength was less, now, and the battle far from won. In truth, it did not seem likely that the battle ever would be won by her unaided efforts.

The slatternly girl, who was kind of heart if she was unprepossessing in her general outward appearance, and who voluntarily took on herself the chores and errands of the tenement during this time of trouble, put her head through the door unbidden and announced:

"A gentleman to see you, Miss Gaston!"

Jep Hill's spy had not only discovered Fannie's place of abode, but he had learned the new name under which she was passing; and that new name, "Fannie Gaston," had been given by Hill, when he inquired for her at the outer door of the tenement.

Fannie flushed and rose, tossing down the fan and giving a swift glance into the little mirror that hung on the wall above the bed.

She was reasonably presentable, she discovered; and she discovered, too, that her cheeks were like fire and that her eyes were glittering and bright.

Her thought was that the gentleman announced was Winthrop Scales.

"Did he send up a card, or tell you his name?" she asked of the girl.

Before the girl could reply, Jep Hill advanced out of the shadows of the corridor.

When Fannie saw him she grew pale, and shrunk against the bed, putting out her hands.

"You will want to see me, I know!" said Hill, giving his words a significant accent.

"Who—who have you heard from?" she demanded. "Father, or—How did you know I was here?—how did you—"

Hill glanced inquiringly at the bed.

Fannie understood the look. What he had to say he did not want to pour into other ears.

"This is an old acquaintance, Mrs. Jones, who has come to see me! You will excuse me for a time, I know!"

She did not further introduce Hill; and Hill did not fail to note that she spoke of him as an acquaintance rather than a friend.

The slatternly girl hovered in the corner, with eyes and ears wide open, greedily drinking in everything, and forming her own conclusions—which were not favorable to Fannie.

With something of an instinctive feeling, the girl knew that Jep Hill was not an honorable man and a gentleman; and she thought it strange that Miss Fannie should know such a man and speak now of desiring a few minutes' conversation with him.

Yet, when she remembered Fannie's thousand acts of kindness, she withdrew her evil thoughts, and declared, inwardly, that, whatever the stranger might be, Fannie was nothing less than an angel.

Releasing herself from her attendance on Mrs. Jones, as well as she could, Fannie Mayport led Jep Hill up a flight of stairs to the chamber occupied by herself and her room-mate.

It was a poorly-furnished apartment, and Jep Hill did not fail to note the manifestations of extreme poverty. His hopes that he might, by lavish promises of wealth, induce Fannie to hearken to his lying words, grew, as he studied her thus amid her poverty-stricken surroundings.

"How did you know I was here?" was Fannie's first question, when they were alone together.

"A friend saw you here and told me of it!"

"Who was that friend?"

"A very excellent fellow, but one whom you would not know anything about if I should try to tell you more."

"And what of father?" she inquired, palpitatingly. "Have—have you seen him lately?"

"I saw him not long ago," said Hill, shifting uneasily under the clear glance of her eyes.

It was a look that made lying extremely difficult,—this clear, open glance of Fannie Mayport's; and Jep Hill felt extremely uncomfortable, under it.

She waited for him to go on; wondering, the while, if he had recently seen the Crescent Sport. This last was a question she did not care to frame.

"I am sorry to say," Hill continued, "that he is as angry with you as ever! I reasoned with him on the subject, but I could not shake him. That father of yours is an extremely obstinate man, Miss Fannie; begging your pardon for speaking with such boldness!"

Hill had made a shrewd guess at the truth: that Fannie Mayport had neither seen nor heard of the advertisement inserted by her father in the Picayune; and so he felt secure in the falsehood he was concocting.

"But I want to assure you that I have never ceased to care for you, to think of you, and that I have searched for you from the moment you set foot in New Orleans, up to this day! Only to-day did I learn where you were; and I hurried to see you as soon as I could, not even stopping to make myself presentable."

This was said, because he looked rather disreputable in the garb he had obtained at the "den," and he had noticed Miss Fannie eying him keenly and questioningly.

"I was forced to do some work about a boat, down at the levee, in which I have an interest, and came direct from there here! It is difficult to get help to do anything, since the epidemic."

Fannie knew that this last was literally true.

The easy assurance with which Jep Hill could lie was phenomenal. Oilily the falsehoods rolled from his tongue.

"You know how much I have always thought of you, Fannie!" he went on. "How much I have loved you! And I beg you to believe that my love is as great to-day as ever; and that it alone led me to search for you as I have. I came to reassure you of my love and my entire devotion to your interest, and to tell you that I will help you in any manner you may desire!"

He glanced significantly at the poor belongings of the room.

"This is not a fit place for you! Will you not let me assist you to find a home that shall be more in keeping with your needs—more like what you have been accustomed to?"

She recoiled from him, with a very perceptible shudder; and he reddened, as he observed it. It was not significant of an easy victory.

"Do not talk to me of love!" she urged. "I do not care to hear it, in such a place and at such a time! If you want to place money in this building, for the benefit of those suffering here from the fever, to be used for medicines, food and delicacies, you will be doing a good deed; and such money may be safely placed in the hands of the landlady! Personally, I could accept nothing from you; nor from any other man, save my father!"

The tears swam in her eyes, as she spoke of her father. That father had been cruel to her, in a most unfatherly manner; yet he was her father!

"I must tell you how much I love you!" Jep Hill persisted. "Do not refuse to lis-

ten to me! My intentions are strictly honorable! I want to make you my wife some day, Fannie! I want to—"

He put out a hand and clutched one of hers, feverishly.

She drew from him, as if his touch were pollution, and got up from her chair.

Her face was very red, and a spark of fire seemed to have kindled in her dark eyes.

"You forget yourself, Mr. Hill!" somewhat coldly. "I have never given you leave to talk to me in this way!"

"But your father has!" Hill interrupted, feeling keenly her tone and manner. "He has given me all his property, in the latest will made by him; and I want you to share that property with me! Do not turn me off in this way, Fannie!"

"As I said," and she strove to speak with calmness, "if you have money you wish to give in charity, to the sick and needy here, place it in the hands of the landlady; and please leave me alone! I will not hear your protestations of love! I scorn your offers! And, if you have any gentlemanly feeling, you will leave me, and not try to see me again!"

He leaped to his feet, as if he meant to seize and detain her; but she slipped through the doorway and vanished down the corridor, leaving him the sole occupant of the room.

He grew white and red by turns, and swore roundly under his breath.

"A square slap in the face! Not to come here any more! 'Leave me alone!' Well, we'll see about that, Miss Fannie! I'm not used to such treatment. I'm nobody's dog!"

His anger grew as he thought of the way she had left him standing there, and of the words last uttered by her; and once he stepped forward, as if he had thoughts of going in search of her and forcing from her a more favorable answer to his entreaties.

But such a course would have been too humiliating. He could swallow his disappointment, conceal the wound given his pride, and bide his time.

He could avenge the insult, if he could not force her love!

"You think you are done with me, no doubt!" and he shook a clinched fist in the direction whence she had disappeared. "But you were never more mistaken! It seems you don't know Jep Hill, even yet!"

Then, as there was nothing else he could do, he walked out of the room and down the stairway to the street.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DESPAIRING EFFORTS.

"JEP HILL, sure! I thought I couldn't be mistaken!"

Bob Bream—quick-witted, bright-eyed, keen-eared—peered out of the mouth of a dark alley, just across from the tenement, and saw Jep Hill open the door, look cautiously about, and then step into the street.

The boy, by the merest chance, had seen Hill enter the house. The look he got, as Hill vanished into the building, had not been of the best, but it had been sufficient to cause Bob Bream to crouch in the alley and await Hill's reappearance.

The boy now emerged from the alley and looked after Hill's retreating-form.

"I wish I was two boys, just for an hour or so! I want to follow him, and I want to see what's in the house! I can't do both! There's one thing, dead sure: he wasn't drowned in the river!"

Bob Bream's resolve was quickly taken. He would ascertain what had drawn Jep Hill to the house.

He had a shrewd suspicion of the truth, for this house was near the place where Fannie Mayport had so strangely disappeared from the view of the sport.

"We can look him up another time," muttered Bob, turning toward the building. "It's something to know he's alive and ready for more deviltry! Now, I'll see what he was doing here!"

The door was slightly ajar—it had not been pulled shut by Hill—and, without a moment's hesitation, the boy crept up the shaky stairway.

When near its top he saw Fannie Mayport come down the corridor.

For an instant he was on the point of revealing himself to her.

Then it occurred to him that it would give the sport great joy to meet her and converse with her, first; and he remained quiet until she was out of sight.

No sooner was she gone than he slipped into the street, and headed straight away for the St. Charles Hotel.

There he found the St. Louis Sport, without difficulty.

The sport, fatigued with the exertions of the previous night and day, had withdrawn to the seclusion of his own room; but there was a standing order that Bob Bream should be permitted to see him at all hours.

There was something in the boy's face, as he stood before the sport, that told the story of his discovery.

"You've seen her!" the sport cried, leaping out of his chair and taking Bob by the shoulder. "Tell me! It's so, isn't it? You've seen her?"

"Give me a chance to report!" said the boy, his face expanding in a smile. "Yes, I've seen her, and I've come to take you to her!"

"And she wants to see me? She sent for me?"

"Not so fast! She don't know anything about you—that is, she don't know that I know where she is! She don't know—"

"Tell me what she does know, then, for pity sake? Where is she?"

The sport was getting his hat and making hasty preparations to follow the boy.

Hurriedly, Bob Bream gave the number and street, and added a brief description of the house.

"I've seen the place—I've passed it a dozen times—but never dreamed she could be there! Tell me all about her!"

This the boy tried to do; and succeeded in telling all he knew, which was little enough.

Winthrop Scales was astonished and nonplused by what he heard. Why had Jep Hill called on Fannie?

He could not believe that Fannie had revealed her location to Hill and invited his attentions! To the sport, that idea was preposterous! He knew, in his inmost heart, that she had done nothing of the kind.

He could not but recall her words of love and her promises of faithfulness, made that night on the upper gallery of the house on the plantation. She had hated Jep Hill, then! She hated him still!

There was but one conclusion: Jep Hill had discovered her whereabouts and was pressing his presence on her, not caring how distasteful it might be!

"We must go there at once!" the sport declared, when he had completed his preparations. "I'm glad you came straight here. The hour is not too late for such a call. She will not have retired for the night! I can't delay till morning!"

He put thoughts of the manner of Hill's escape from the river aside, for the time, and gave his mind wholly to the pleasure anticipated from the expected interview with Fannie.

The knowledge that she was alive and seemingly well, was joy enough. But he would augment that joy by a personal interview; and he would assure her that he still loved her and had never ceased to think of her! He could not but believe that she would be pleased to see him, in spite of the way she had concealed herself from him and from all former friends.

He fancied he understood something of the feelings of delicacy prompting her in that line of action.

Bob Bream chattered on, as they left the hotel and struck off in the direction of the tenement, but the sport heard not a half of what the boy said. Only when Bob touched on Fannie or Jep Hill did Scales have ears to hear.

A horse car carried them the greater portion of the distance; and a walk of only a few minutes was required, in addition, to place them in front of the door through which Hill had entered some time before.

A ring at the bell brought down the slatternly girl.

"We wish to see Miss Fannie Mayport!" Hill explained, handing the girl his card and one of Bob's.

A blank look came into the girl's face.

"They ain't no such lady here!" she averred, shaking her head.

"But I saw her!" Bob Bream declared.

"Less than an hour ago, I saw her, walking along that corridor up there!"

"Well, I guess you didn't do no such thing!" the girl snapped, with a suspicious glance. "They ain't no such lady here; and you wusn't here, neither, for I tends this door myself, and I ought to know!"

Bob, not to be beaten in this way, gave a quick description of Fannie.

The girl's eyes widened a trifle.

"It may be Miss Gaston that you want to see! Her name's Fannie, and she looks like what you say!"

"Take our cards to Miss Gaston, then, please!" the sport urged. "And tell her that we very much desire to see her for a moment or two, if no more!"

The girl took the cards and disappeared, leaving them to wait impatiently below.

She was gone an interminably long time, as it seemed.

When she returned, she still held the cards and there was a blank look on her face.

"I can't find her, nowheres!" she gasped. "Mrs. Jones ain't seen her, nor none of the other roomers, and we don't none of us know what's become of her. She ain't in the house, sir!"

This last to Scales.

Scales's breath came chokingly. His fear was great.

Without an instant's hesitation, he pushed back his coat and revealed his detective badge—a badge secured for him by Gabe Ganderfoot.

"I am an officer," he said, assuming a quietness of demeanor he did not feel. "I must take a glance at Miss Gaston's room."

There was a possibility that Miss Gaston was not Fannie Mayport!

The mystery might be solved, and something of the truth concerning her disappearance discovered, by an inspection of the room.

"Mebbe the other young lady who lives there with her mayn't like it!" the girl urged, visibly awed by that indication of authority. "But she ain't there, neither; so, if you want to go into the room, I guess there ain't no one to tell you not to. Most of the things that belonged to Miss Gaston has been taken out of it, though!"

The mystery grew deeper and darker.

"We must go, if only for a minute!" the sport declared, feeling not sure that this was, after all, the proper thing to do, but determined to get at the bottom facts of the case.

On his declaration that he still desired to inspect the room, the girl led the way upstairs and showed him into the small, cramped apartment that had been occupied by Fannie Mayport.

A qualm of conscience, or something akin to it, smote Scales, as he peered about. The thing he was doing seemed so sneaking and unbecoming of a gentleman. What right, after all, had he to be prying into the affairs of Fannie Mayport and poking about here, among her belongings?

He could hardly make himself feel that the ends justified the means!

There were many signs of a hasty flight from the place, not one of which missed the keen vision of the sport. What he saw, he read as plainly as the lines of a book:

Fannie Mayport, annoyed by the call from Jep Hill—perhaps frightened by it—had fled from this place.

The shatteringly girl hovered in the corridor, watchful and suspicious.

"Some one—some man—called to see Miss Gaston, this evening? Was it his first visit here?"

The girl stared, at the question; but she shuffled forward, and made answer:

"Yes, they was a man called on her to-night; but he hadn't never been here before!"

"What was his name?"

The girl flushed.

She had eavesdropped and overheard something of the conversation between Hill and Fannie.

"His name was Hill, sir! Leastways, that's what I heard her call 'im!"

The sport's conjecture was proven to be truth: Jep Hill had frightened Fannie Mayport by his previously unannounced call; and she, fearing such calls were to become common, had abandoned this poor home and

was again a fugitive in the streets of the Crescent City.

Such a shower of questions as Scales poured on the head of the girl! She could do nothing but stare, as she answered them.

The information gathered was, however, meager enough. The girl was willing to tell, but she lacked the knowledge.

"We may be mistaken!" said Scales, to the boy, as they left the house, meaning rather that he might be mistaken; for Bob Bream had not ventured to express his beliefs and theories. "She may have left for only a few hours. We'll come back, in the morning! Perhaps, then, there will be some news of her!"

"Yes, sir!" said Bob, anxious to aid all he could.

"And you'll watch that house, as a cat watches a mouse-hole! See every one that comes and goes, and report to me!"

"Yes, sir! When shall I begin?"

The Crescent City Sport stopped at the corner, and looked at his watch.

"Commence to-night!" he said. "Right now! If you discover anything important, let me know. No matter what turns up, use your head. You've got a good one; and you'll know what to do quite as well, I've no doubt, as I could tell you!"

Bob Bream was immensely flattered, as he had a right to be; and promised eagle-eyed fidelity and faithfulness.

Then he slipped back toward the houses; while the sport continued on toward his room.

But, in the morning, Bob Bream had nothing to report.

He and the sport visited the tenement that day, and made no new discoveries. Fannie Mayport's room-mate was there, but she could throw no light on Fannie's strange disappearance.

The next day and the next, the sport and Bob Bream made similar visits and inquiries, with precisely the same results. Fanny Mayport did not return to the tenement, nor communicate with its occupants.

The poor people who occupied the building were inconsolable. They missed her ministering hand and her sympathetic kindness. Mrs. Jones wept like a child.

"There was never a better or a kinder girl!" she sobbed. "She was an angel!"

"She was that!" the sport agreed. "If we could only find some trace of her!"

Of course these visits and inquiries created much talk and stir in the tenement, and served for a time to distract the thoughts of the occupants from the inroads of the fever. In that, they may have been beneficial. Certainly they achieved no other results!

The police were made acquainted with the disappearance of the young woman and spent much time in a search. The Picayune held advertisements for Miss Fannie Gaston, as well as for Miss Fannie Mayport; but all were alike fruitless.

Colonel Jackson Mayport was found and led to assist in this new hunt. He was broken by failure, and this added failure did not strengthen him.

And thus the days slipped by, and grew into weeks; and the fever raged with increasing violence; and Winthrop Scales began to believe that Fannie Mayport had been one of its many victims.

Otherwise, it was unaccountable that a woman could so lose herself in the Crescent City—could so vanish, that all the force of the police, as well as the exertions of willing friends, could not locate her.

And Jep Hill was equally invisible!

He had called once at the tenement; had been sighted and followed by Bob Bream; but had eluded the boy's pursuit, and had sunk out of sight.

And the heart of the Crescent City Sport, torn and worn, seemed to the point of breaking—if it was not already broken.

He was a changed man. There was a hollowness of the cheeks, a brightness of the eyes, and a yellowness of the skin, that caused friends to shake their heads, and to declare that he would soon become a victim of the fever.

Then occurred a circumstance to awaken him into new life.

It roused him and thrilled him, put new strength into him, and new hope into his heart.

What that circumstance was we will let the next chapter reveal.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE.

WHEN the Hoosier Detective, Gabe Ganderfoot, was dropped from the oyster-boat into the Mississippi, he did not descend to his death, as the reader may have fancied.

It seemed truly impossible that he could have escaped such a fate; but he lived to tell the tale and to pursue the authors of that outrageous attempt on his life.

It will be recollected that he went aboard the oyster-boat disguised as the Dutchman from the French Market, and that he was stricken senseless and dropped into the river, with a weight of iron attached to his feet, during the darkness of night.

The guilty parties were Jep Hill, Scalesy Castro, and the negro, who was afterward shot and killed by the police.

Not one of them doubted that the detective had slipped over the edge of the oyster-boat to his death.

But a kindly chance—shall we call it Providence or blind fate?—had placed directly beneath his descending form a submerged barge.

The barge had got adrift some hours before, had filled with water from the dashing waves of mid-stream, and had finally sunk; and was held against the muddy bottom by a growth of rank grass, in which it had become entangled.

The river was not deep, nor the current strong, at the point chosen by the villains on the oyster-boat for the watery interment of the detective. In truth, if the oyster-boat had floated a few yards further down-stream it would have struck against the sunken barge.

In spite of the weight of iron dragging him downward, the detective drifted slightly, and his feet came down on the barge.

If he had been in possession of his senses, he could have stood upright, and so have kept his head from descending beneath the waves.

However, the chill of the water, striking him like an electric shock, sufficed to restore him, in a degree; and, when his head and body sunk beneath the waves, he choked and coughed and strangled.

It was a very fortunate occurrence that the oyster-boat had floated on with the stream.

None of its occupants observed the air bubbles that rose to the surface above the detective's head, and it is very likely they would not have attached much importance to it if they had witnessed this fact, for they knew he was not dead when pitched over.

The detective strangled and gasped, and the exertion and choking brought back his struggling senses.

He knew he was in the water and that his feet were pressing something firm and hard. He knew, also, that his feet were as heavy as lead; though he did not, at the moment, reason out the cause.

Thus strangling and gasping, the detective's head and face came again to the surface, with his long arms vainly beating the air.

He was in a bewildered condition, notwithstanding the partial return of his mental faculties.

He did not know where he was, nor recall his visit to the oyster-boat.

But the instinct of self-preservation caused him to gouge the water out of his face and eyes, and cough it out of his mouth and nostrils.

He felt the current rippling gently against his legs; and began to see, as soon as his eyes were clear, that an immense area of water lay about him.

He tried to lift his feet, to determine the character of the substance on which he was standing; and found he could not. His feet seemed chained to the spot.

The oyster-boat had by this time drifted so far away, that the detective could not have seen it, if he had known of its presence and directed his gaze in a search.

A fierce pain in his head, brought back to Ganderfoot the main facts connected with his visit to the oyster-boat, and the blow there given him, and when this much of recollection had dawned on him, it did not take him long to tie up the raveled ends of memory, and come to a correct understanding of the events that had recently befallen him.

He now knew why his feet were so heavy; but, to make assurance doubly sure, he stooped down, ducked his head and arms under the water, at considerable risk, and felt of the leather thongs that held his feet.

On his person there was no weapon of any sort; no knife, or cutting implement.

Apparently he was chained there, in the middle of the river; too weak, and altogether too bereft and helpless to accomplish his release.

He looked about over the water; and afar off to where the light, burning against the sky, showed him the location of the city.

No steamboats were near; no craft of any description, so far as he could determine.

A groan shook him, in spite of the courage that was his on every occasion. His case seemed so hopeless!

He knew that if the wind kicked up and the waves began to roll and pound, he could not retain his position on the substance that was holding him up in seeming mid-stream.

Just what that substance was he could only guess, though his fingers had told him there was wood or plank beneath his feet.

He thought it a barge or sunken boat; and so hit the truth pretty closely.

But for a fear of the men who had hurled him to a fancied death, and the belief that calls would avail him nothing, he would have sent up shouts for assistance.

He felt that his only hope lay in remaining in his present position till the coming of day.

And what a dreary, perilous and chilling wait it promised to be!

Then, as his mind began to work in the old strong grooves, and resolution began to swell again in his brave heart, he bethought him of trying to release himself from the iron that clogged his feet.

If he could release his feet, he would not have to stand there and permit the wind-raised waves to ride over him;—and already he fancied he could feel the first breath of a rising breeze fanning his feverish cheeks.

As he could not lift his feet, he submerged his head and shoulders again; and, with searching and straining fingers, sought to discover and untie the knots of the leather thongs.

The water had caused the leather cords to stretch, as he found, to his great joy; so that he could easily insert his fingers between them and his ankles.

But he could remain with his head under the water only a moment or two at a time.

However, he was much encouraged by the nature of his discovery; and began to hope, with a growing hope, that he might yet escape from these bonds.

Again and again he sunk himself beneath the water; and tugged and toiled at the leather cords until forced to rise for breath and a resting spell.

And he could feel at each time that he was accomplishing something; that the knots were giving and the bonds loosing their grip!

And finally, he almost whooped, as his head popped out of the water; for the thongs had been torn from his feet, and his feet were free!

Still, the darkness clung about him—darkness and silence—and he knew not how far away was the shore, nor the course of action he ought to follow.

For an hour or more, Ganderfoot clung to the submerged barge, not daring to leave it and trust himself to the river; when he was cheered by the sight of a steamboat making its way, puffingly, down the stream.

He was quite certain it would pass very near to him; and, when it arrived at a point nearly opposite, and its lights flicked the waters and its hot funnels painted redly the sky, Ganderfoot sent up a mighty shout for help.

His lungs were of the strongest; and that call echoed loudly over the waters; and, as it was succeeded by others as lusty, the crew of the boat heard and turned their attention toward him.

The big steamboat swung round, the paddles backed water and churned the yeasty flood; and a lowered boat came bouncing across the waves, guided by Ganderfoot's calls.

And in a little while, the Hoosier Detec-

tive was safe aboard the boat, and was telling his story to the captain and crew.

The steamboat was the "City Point," bound for a run down-stream, and a side trip along some wide bayous, that would take it from the city for some time.

For this reason, Ganderfoot did not wish to remain aboard of it; and, at his request, he was put ashore at a place where he could reach the shanty of a fisherman.

He had told to the officers and crew of the City Point so much of his story as he had thought advisable, and had thanked them over and over for saving his life and for their uniform kindness; and he parted from them with a feeling of sadness. In that short time he seemed to have known them for months!

He found the fisherman's cabin without difficulty.

It squatted in the grass like a marsh hen, and was indistinguishable a short distance. Had he not been directed to it so clearly he would not have found it.

Fortunately, the fisherman was in; and, when the detective had made his wants known, the fisherman placed a rude cot at his disposal, and promised to awake him at sight of the first vessel going toward New Orleans.

But before morning, Gabe Ganderfoot was in the delirium of a fever.

The blow on the head, and the excitement that had followed his return to consciousness, had brought about this result.

For days and weeks he lay there, in that fishing-hut, tossing in fever, attended only by the fisherman; while his friends and enemies in New Orleans believed him dead.

But he recovered! The fever abated, and strength came slowly back; and, one long-to-be-remembered day, he walked into the room of Winthrop Scales, the St. Louis Sport, startling that individual almost out of his senses.

This was the cheering shock that restored to the sport the fire and vim of other days and rekindled in his breast the dying spark of hope.

Gabe Ganderfoot, the irrepressible and original Hoosier Detective, was at his side, once more; able and willing to assist him in his search for Fannie Mayport, and in his efforts to run down and bring Jep Hill to well-merited justice.

Was it not enough to startle the sport into new life?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A HOT TRAIL.

"HAI!"

There was a slight, almost imperceptible, recoil of the body, as the exclamation slipped through the set lips, and a nervous twitching of the hands that rested so easily and carelessly in the loose coat-pockets.

Seemingly, the man who had thus started at the sight of a face passing before him, and of a form vanishing into a big building, was a stranger to these pages.

The face was clean-shaven; the hair dark and heavy; the clothing of good make, but not fashionable!

But look again! Is there not a familiar gleam in the eye, an aggressiveness in the poise of the head, a certain something akin to slouchiness in the attitude? Do not all these things indicate a friend? Do they not mark the man as Gabe Ganderfoot?

The building, in which the detective was taking so much interest, and through whose portals the form seen by him had vanished, was a pretentious structure on Canal street; and was well-known, in the days of this story, to the upper class of gamblers and sporting river men who so thronged New Orleans.

Ganderfoot had apparently been watching this building for some definite purpose, as certain muttered words would indicate; words to which he whisperingly gave tongue, when the form disappeared:

"Jep Hill! Certain as I'm a sinner, it's him! I thought it was him, when I seen him before; now, I'm shure of it!"

There were the same lapses of pronunciation which always marked the Hoosier Detective, no matter what the disguise assumed.

Ever since his re-appearance in the city,

Ganderfoot had devoted all his spare time to unearthing Jep Hill.

That ought to have been his principal business, he knew; but he had given more hours to the search for Fannie Mayport than he had to the detective work that originally drew him to the Crescent City.

Sure that the man seen was none other than Jep Hill, Gabe Ganderfoot slouched his heavy hat forward over his eyes, and entered the building.

Short as had been the interval, Jep Hill was not to be seen by the detective on crossing the threshold.

The rooms of the building—and especially those devoted to gaming—were brilliantly lighted. Glittering chandeliers, whose rays strove to outdo those of the sun, gleamed from every point, and shed their light dazingly over the cut-glass behind the bars, where white-aproned men waited assiduously on a horde of thirsty customers.

Not even the devastating plague could stop the work of the gambling hells, nor keep the men from pouring down their throats the poison dispensed at the bars.

A crowd of handsomely dressed men lounged through the rooms and sat at the tables, or stood in front of the various devices devoted to the goddess of fortune; while the monotonous cries of the "dealers" rose above every other sound.

The Hoosier Detective was manifestly out of place in such a throng, but he so conducted himself that no suspicious eye wandered in his direction.

And a native and wonderful power of adaptation seemed to smooth away the awkwardness of his step and manner, and to make him appear as one who of right belonged there.

From room to room Ganderfoot wandered, looking through each for Jep Hill.

Finally, his gaze rested on the object of his search.

Hill sat at a gaming table at the further side of a large room, and was evidently deep in a game of cards. A heap of money was piled at his elbow, showing that his bettings and his winnings were large.

For some time Ganderfoot stood aloof, watching Hill with keen and stealthy glance, studying out the various intricacies of Hill's disguise, for Hill was so scantily, and withal, so cleverly disguised that the manner of it was worth study.

In the first place a little mustache, different from anything ever worn by him, adorned Hill's upper lip. A pair of glasses sat astride his nose and half-concealed his eyes. His hair had been dyed in a way to imitate streaks of gray; and various other little alterations made him seem quite a different person.

"I couldn't 'a' done better myself!" Ganderfoot confessed. "Fact is, I don't think I could 'a' done half so well! I must give myself credit fer seein' through all them little tricks, fer they're good ones!"

Having watched Hill thus for some time, and having made up his mind as to what he wanted to do, he edged slowly toward Hill's chair.

He had decided to place Hill under arrest, and sing out for aid to the blue-coated guardians of the law that he saw sauntering here and there through the building.

It was a desperate risk, but he preferred it to the chance that Hill might again slip through his fingers.

But some mysterious and subtle feeling seemed to warn Jep Hill of impending danger; for no sooner did the detective work in that direction, than Hill gathered up his earnings and left the table.

However, he did not once look toward Ganderfoot, so far as the latter could determine, and it seemed unlikely that he could have penetrated the detective's disguise and become aware of the impending peril that he was in.

Ganderfoot was astonished at Hill's movement, and glanced about to ascertain if Hill did not have some confederate in the room who had conveyed to him a warning; but, if such confederate there was, Ganderfoot could not detect the fact.

Not willing that Hill should thus escape him, Ganderfoot instantly hastened after, determined to overtake and arrest him before he could leave the gambling-house.

But before he could come up with Hill, the

latter turned up a stairway and vanished from sight.

As he disappeared, Hill gave a quick, backward glance, and Ganderfoot fancied that the eyes of the fugitive were bent full on him.

Ganderfoot came to a full stop, instead of hurrying on up the stairway.

It had suddenly occurred to him that he was being led into another trap!

He was so anxious to arrest Hill, however, now that the long-sought opportunity seemed to have come, that he was willing to take big risks; and, after an instant's hesitation, he leaped up the stairway.

But, when the landing was gained, Hill was not to be seen.

A wide corridor led from the landing, past a number of rooms, to a point where it seemed to connect with another corridor; and Ganderfoot hurried on.

At the junction of the corridors he came face to face with Jep Hill, who, for some reason, had turned back.

The astonishment depicted on Hill's face was of so genuine a sort that Ganderfoot knew Hill had not dreamed of pursuit. The look revealed, too, the fact that Hill saw through Ganderfoot's disguise.

Hill sought to hurry on past the detective.

"Just a word with you, my friend!" said Ganderfoot, to cause a halt and a moment's hesitation. "There is a room up here where Senator—"

But Jep Hill sought to pass, nevertheless, without replying, in spite of the rudeness of the act to a seeming stranger.

Not to be balked, Ganderfoot caught Hill's right wrist; and, with the disengaged hand, brought out a pair of handcuffs, which he tried to apply.

"No, you don't, curse you!" Hill grated, tearing the hand away and striking at Ganderfoot's face. "No tricks like that, you infernal hound!"

The detective cleverly avoided the blow; and, seeing that a contest was inevitable, threw himself boldly on Jep Hill.

But Hill was thoroughly alarmed and desperate, and his fright gave him uncommon strength and dexterity.

He hurled the detective from him and tried to run.

A blow from Ganderfoot's fist brought him to his knees; but he scrambled up and struck again at Ganderfoot's head.

Ganderfoot's long arm reached out and caught him by the shoulder, and then Hill lifted his voice in a cry for help.

Ganderfoot tried to cling to him, hold him and apply the handcuffs. But Hill, who now gave all his attention to wrestling away, succeeded once more in hurling the detective from him; and then disappeared down the corridor with the speed of a deer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN DIREST PERIL.

GANDERFOOT hastened after Jep Hill, at his best gait; but the fleeing rascal managed to elude him in a turn of the corridors, and Ganderfoot could not overtake him.

Hill's cries for help seemed to have reached no one, for there came no visible response.

"Blast the luck!" Ganderfoot growled, as he made his way down stairs and toward the bar, when he was sure Hill had got out of the building. "I don't know when I've so failed! Mebbe I'm gittin' stupid, these days! I was shore certain I had him!"

He looked keenly into the faces about the bar, not knowing but Hill might try the bold trick of staying in the crowd and lighted rooms.

Then he passed on to the street, his face showing his disappointment.

But no sooner had he gained the outer steps than he started as violently as on that previous occasion when he had sighted Hill.

Before him he saw Hill's special tool and spy, Scaley Castro, slinking away.

It was evident that Castro had not observed the detective emerge from the building; and, assured of this, Ganderfoot began at once to dog Castro's footsteps, pretty sure that Castro would fetch up at the same place as Jep Hill.

He had apparently lost Hill, but here was the opportunity offering of finding him again; and the detective seized it with eagerness.

All unaware that he was being followed, Scaley Castro headed away in the direction of the levee; though his long years of sneak-thievery and crime had made him so cautious that he dived into and out of alleys and side streets, when there was no apparent use for so doing.

The Hoosier Detective clung to him like his own shadow; and so trailed him to a small building looking like a warehouse, that stood only a few feet from the water's edge, and on the very verge of the cotton wharf so frequently mentioned.

About this house Castro skirmished for a minute or two, before venturing up to it, as if he feared he might be seen by eyes he did not wish to rest on him.

The night was misty and dark, and the rows of gas jets along the adjacent streets had a sickly, yellow look. Out in the river, the lights of the steamboats and the various other river craft failed utterly to relieve the gloom.

The watching detective, observing the house closely—for he was sure that Castro desired to enter it—muttered:

"Strange I never before thought of that house, when I've seen it so many times, and it's so near the wharf! Castro and Jep Hill and Ward and others have disappeared in this neighborhood, many times!"

Yet, thinking thus, the detective did not dream of the secret that the house hid.

After a time of hesitation and cautious surveying, in which he failed utterly to observe the watching form of the detective, Scaley Castro approached the house and vanished.

There was no door at the point where he disappeared; and Ganderfoot, hurrying up, saw that, at that point, there was a small, round window.

It was dirty, as he could tell by passing his fingers over the glass, and seemed unused; yet he knew that Castro had slipped it aside and had gone through the aperture thus made.

After a moment's thought, he decided to do likewise.

There was no telling what direful peril he might place himself in by this, but he resolved to take the chances. That there was some sort of thieves' den hidden behind that innocent-looking window, he was well assured.

He tried to move the sash aside, but it hung, and a minute's fumbling was needed to reveal a catch that held it in place. This catch he slipped; and then carefully crawled through the opening.

While doing this he made hardly as much noise as a moving rat.

Having squeezed through the window, he closed it behind him, and then rose to his feet.

He knew he was in some sort of room; but the gloom was thick and he could tell nothing of its character or contents.

After a time, his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and he made out the dimensions of the room. The continued silence told him it was empty. Scaley Castro had not tarried in this room.

About were boxes and bales, telling that the place was some sort of a warehouse.

In truth, though Ganderfoot did not dream of it at the time, the house he was now in was occupied as a warehouse by a member of the gang of river thieves; who used it thus that it might be made to hide from prying eyes the entrance to the thieves' den beneath the cotton wharf.

Just opposite the point where he stood, the detective finally saw a door, which he cautiously approached.

The door was slightly ajar; and a damp, cold air ascending from it made him sure it connected with some subterranean chamber.

He could not doubt that Castro had felt so safe that he did not think it necessary to close and lock this door.

After a moment's hesitation, the detective passed this door, and found himself standing on a damp and slippery stairway, that led he knew not whither.

Before advancing further, he drew out his pistol and held it in readiness for instant use. He knew he was in a perilous situation,

though he did not dream how great his peril really was.

Having descended the flight of slippery stairs, and being every moment in danger from the slipperiness of the steps and the darkness, Ganderfoot proceeded along a passage and soon found himself in front of another door.

This door was closed, and from behind it there came the indistinct sound of voices.

Ganderfoot tried the knob; and, when it yielded, he pushed the door slightly ajar.

As he could not see the people who were talking, and was extremely anxious to know who they were and what they were talking about, he passed through the doorway.

Craning his neck, he was able to look around a damp and foul-smelling angle of rotting boards; and there, not many feet away, stood Scaley Castro, talking to a number of ill-favored men.

Ganderfoot had now a pretty accurate idea of the sort of place he was in; and, though it increased his sense of peril, he did not desire to beat a retreat.

He was hesitating as to what he ought to do, when a man came toward the door, swinging a bunch of keys; and he heard the words that were shot after this man, by one who seemed to be a leader:

"You better 'tend to your bizness a little better, Jim! A guard's place is not hyer, gabbin'!"

Jim seemed to feel this, himself; for he made no reply to the stricture.

This movement of the guard increased the detective's danger of discovery.

Seeing it was impossible to beat a safe retreat, and not anxious to make his way out of the place for awhile, Ganderfoot slipped quietly to the ground; and, with a quick movement squirmed aside into a corner of the room.

In this corner he found a bundle of damp clothes, which he speedily and gratefully drew about him.

The guard did not hear the movements made, and for a time Ganderfoot was safe; but he was, as he felt, in the lion's den, from which he might never escape.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A DESPERATE EXPLOIT.

THE guard passed through the door, which he closed after him, and ascended to the upper room, evidently for the purpose of guarding the door and window there.

Ganderfoot could hear him as he tramped up the stairway, and as he stepped across the floor.

By a mere chance, as it seemed, had Ganderfoot been able to gain access to the building. A bit of inattention and carelessness on the part of the guard had admitted into the den this great enemy of thieves and of the leader of this particular band of thieves! No doubt a long period of safety had caused the thieves to lose much of their caution.

Scarcely had the guard above settled himself for his night's vigil, when a peculiar tapping against the window drew his attention.

The scratching signal was followed by the whispered utterance of a "pass-word," and then Jep Hill, himself, was admitted to the building.

A queer feeling came to Ganderfoot, as he heard Hill's voice, and his steps on the stairway.

He shrunk closer beneath his covering of damp clothing, as Hill came into the underground apartment.

It did not make him feel any too comfortable to realize that his life would not be worth a moment's purchase, if Jep Hill found him there!

Hill moved along, so close to him that Ganderfoot could have touched him with outstretched hand.

"Didn't see anything of that infernal detective, I reckon?" Hill questioned of Castro. "I didn't know but you might, as you were there in front of the gambling-house!"

Castro started, for this was the first information he had received that Hill had been in danger, or that a detective was on their trail.

He believed—and Hill had believed, until that evening—that Gabe Ganderfoot was no longer in the land of the living, that he had, long before, become food for fishes!

Castro stared so, that Hill felt forced to enter into an explanation; and it pleased the detective, and gratified his professional pride to note how much in fear of him this band stood. They seemed to feel that if he were alive, they were no longer safe, for a moment.

"I don't understand it at all!" Hill went on. "You wouldn't expect me to tell you how he did it, I reckon? But, he's alive; which goes to show that we did not drown him in the river! I know, though, that he went over the side of that oyster-boat and into the water, with enough iron tied to his feet to pull him to the bottom!"

There was a strange look—almost of fear and awe—on Jap Hill's face, as he made this statement; and among his men it was evident that superstitious thoughts were at work.

They were an ignorant lot, for the most part, and ready to believe that demons or evil spirits had assisted the detective in this remarkable escape.

All this, of course, immensely pleased Gabe Ganderfoot, who saw safety from it; and he began to plan how he might rise there in their midst as a ghost, with those clothes about him, and, by uttering sepulchral sentences, escape from among them, should it become necessary.

He even ventured to chuckle, as his thoughts ran on in this way, outlining a plan of action.

The wildest conjecture of Jap Hill or any of his followers did not place the dreaded detective in the "den," within sound of their voices and in sight of their anxious faces, however! That would have been according him altogether too much ability!

The talk drifted from the detective, finally, to matters connected with the work of the river thieves. And Ganderfoot learned that Lewis had died here in the "den," of fever; and that various members of the band were sick, in other places.

After a long time, Jap Hill and all but one man took their departure.

But, after they were gone, Ganderfoot could hear the guard moving about in the upper room, and knew that there were two enemies in the house, whom he might have to fight before getting out of it.

And as he lay there, in his corner, planning how to get out, a startling and fruitful suggestion came to him.

He began to ask himself if it was not possible to capture these two men and make them tell him the secrets of the place and the best manner in which to set a trap for their comrades; for he was resolved, now that he knew where Hill and his followers had their place of hiding, to capture the whole of them.

He fancied there must be another entrance, recalling how Ward and Hill had escaped by diving into the river just off this cotton wharf.

The more he thought of making prisoners of the men who still staid in the building, the more Ganderfoot became anxious to try it; and at length he moved from his corner, and, with pistol held in readiness, crawled toward the man still in the lower room.

The man did not dream that an enemy was within a mile; and was crouching on the floor, mumbling to himself and seemingly engaged in counting out some money.

A lamp burned near his head, outlining him plainly.

Ganderfoot shifted the pistol to his left hand and lifted himself to spring on the kneeling figure.

As he did so, one of his feet caught in a bit of rope that lay twisted on the floor, and, instead of rising to his full stature, he was pitched forward, and rolled against the heels of the very man he meant to capture.

The man was so startled that he dropped the bag of coin. However, he did not dream, even then, of peril; but thought the figure which had fallen at his feet was that of some drunken member of the band, who had been lying asleep near the wall and been overlooked.

He stooped to lift Ganderfoot; and the detective, seeing that he must feign the thing thought by the thief, if he meant still to succeed, permitted the man to clasp him.

Then, while the thief was still off his guard, Ganderfoot whirled quickly and caught him by the throat.

The grip was like iron; and so cut off the rascal's wind that he could not cry out.

Ganderfoot held him thus, with his strong right hand; and then thrust the cold muzzle of the pistol against the fellow's head, and hissed:

"Say a word, and I'll send a ball through your brain! You know me! I'm Gabe Ganderfoot, the river detective!"

The man's eyes were already starting; and now his countenance became fairly green, so great was his terror. He felt himself a dead man, for he did not dream that the dreaded detective would spare him.

This state of helpless terror was just the condition in which Ganderfoot wished to place him; and he continued his horrible threats, as he slipped out a pair of handcuffs.

He secured the man's hands and feet and then thrust a gag into his mouth.

Having done this, he slipped out to the door and listened.

There was not a sound to indicate that the noise of the struggle had reached the guard; who was somnolent, at that moment, as the hour was growing late.

Sure of this, Ganderfoot went back to his prisoner, and drew him toward the light. Then he picked up the coins on the floor and thrust them, with the purse, into the pockets of his prisoner.

"I don't want to rob you! That's not my line! But you've got to tell me how to get out of this place! I know there's another way, besides that!"

He nodded toward the stairway.

"If I take the gag out of your mouth, you'll tell me where the other entrance is? Is that what you mean?"

While so persuadingly asking these questions, Ganderfoot again brought the pistol into view. He had many times found its arguments more powerful than all else.

The fellow's eyes brightened.

"I'll not kill you—I'll not even hurt you, if you speak the truth! I want to know how many ways there are of getting out of this beastly hole!"

He slipped the gag aside, so that the fellow could use his tongue.

"They's only one other way!" was the answer.

"And where is that?"

"Jist over there! Slip that panel; and creep along the mud until you come to the water!"

"And then what?"

"Lunge right into it and swim! You'll come up out in the river! We don't never use that way, less'n we're crowded and have to!"

That, then, indicated the manner in which Lewis and Jap Hill had gained access to this secure retreat! Ganderfoot saw it all, now!

His thoughts were busy, as he listened to the words of the prisoner and plied him with queries. He was planning how to capture the band on the following night.

He heard, now, the guard moving about in the room above, which hastened his planning and brought a change in his scheme.

He snapped the gag into place, in the prisoner's mouth, and stood him on his feet.

Then he ordered him to move on and show the exit by way of the river.

A minute later, he was out under the cotton wharf, with his prisoner, standing in the oozy mud and staring ahead, trying to see what was before him.

He could hear the roar of the river, and his hands held the prisoner by the collar.

Though he feared that the absence of this member of the band from the "den" might create suspicion and tend to thwart his plans, nothing better suggested than to take the prisoner with him and land him in jail.

A few further questions were now put to the prisoner, after the gag was removed, and then Ganderfoot was ready to breast the river.

Though he freed the man's feet, he kept the handcuffs in place. The man claimed to be a good swimmer, and Ganderfoot could assist him, and could sing out for help when the surface of the stream was gained, should help be then needed.

Then the struggle with the stream commenced.

Ganderfoot kept one hand on the shoulder of the prisoner, and they arose to the surface together.

The detective had feared, and still feared, an attempt at escape; but the fellow was so thoroughly cowed and stood in such fear of the detective that no such effort was made. Probably it would have been useless, as Ganderfoot was on guard against anything of the kind.

They arose near the levee, which they reached, without much difficulty.

The water streamed from their garments; but Ganderfoot ordered the man on in advance of him; and, without any help from the police, landed him in the nearest prison.

A desperate undertaking had succeeded!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A COOL CAPTURE.

It was late—nearly midnight—when Winthrop Scales entered his bedroom. The night was hot; and, aside from that, there was a heated look on his face. He had tarried too long in the close atmosphere below, and had engaged in a play that was too exciting.

Nevertheless, his eyes saw as clearly as usual and his ears were as keen; and, as he crossed the threshold and glanced about the familiar apartment, brilliantly-illuminated by a gas jet, he could hardly repress a start.

What he saw told him an enemy had gained the room in advance of him and was in all probability lying in wait to take his life.

Yet, hardly a line of the sport's face changed; and only the glint of the eyes told of the emotion that stirred within him.

Ganderfoot, the river detective, had already made his descent on the "den" beneath the cotton wharf.

It had been in a measure successful. The surprise had been complete! Every avenue of escape had been vigilantly guarded, so that all within the den had been taken.

But neither Jap Hill nor Scalesy Castro were in the den at the time, to the intense disappointment of the detective.

What cared he for the arrest of these common thieves? They were not the men he sought!

So that, although the movement had been conducted with all caution, and had been in a measure successful, the success was not of the kind sought by Ganderfoot.

Thoughts of how Jap Hill and Scalesy Castro had evaded capture, flashed through the mind of the Crescent City Sport, as he saw those evidences that the room was occupied by an assassin; and he wondered if the person in hiding was not one of them?

The evidences telling him the room was occupied were of a character to be overlooked by any one less keen-eyed or less wary.

But the sport had been made cautious by a constant shouldering against danger.

On the floor was a speck of sand—not a pure sand, but the conglomerate of coal and grit supplied by the streets of New Orleans.

He knew that his feet had not put it there—that it was not there when he left the apartment!

He likewise observed that one of the chairs was displaced. He had left it near a window, and it now stood more than two feet from that location.

Again, a book that had rested on the center table had been shoved from its position; and there was a slight displacement of the bed-clothing.

"Yes, there's some one in the room—or some one has been in the room. Those changes were not made by a servant—I'm sure of that!"

He was too familiar with the touches that the servants always gave the place, to err in this, he felt sure.

Glancing keenly about the room, without at all seeming to do so, he learned that the only point where an assassin could lurk was beneath the bed.

Having assured himself of this, he coolly made his preparations for retiring, moving about with such an air of unconcern that, whoever the watcher might be, it was pretty certain he would be fooled by the sport's utter sangfroid.

"It's so everlastingly late, I don't believe I'll take off all my clothing!" he muttered, in tones just loud enough to be overheard.

"I want to get up early, if I don't oversleep!"

Then he turned the gas low; and, half-undressed, threw himself on the bed.

In a little while, he seemed to be sleeping soundly, for his heavy breathing was broken, now and then, by a snore.

Yet the sport was never more wide awake. His half-closed lids allowed him to look out over the dimly-lighted room; and, beneath the covering, his hands clutched pistol and knife. He was ready for any emergency.

A half-hour passed without a sound, other than those made by his seeming slumber; then a subdued scraping was heard beneath the bed; and, a little later, Scaley Castro's evil face rose into view.

Scaley Castro was there, that night, as the hired tool of Jep Hill, to strike the deadly blow and incur the risk that Hill was too cowardly to undertake.

Scaley was not cowardly, and he was utterly without a conscience!

Slowly he rose to his full height and looked at the form on the bed.

The sport, viewing him through his half-closed lids, fancied he could see the fiery glint of murder in Scaley's eyes.

It was a moment of supreme suspense; yet the sport, tense as was the strain, never moved a muscle, nor for a moment ceased to play the part of a sleeping man.

Apparently satisfied by his inspection, Scaley moved toward the head of the bed; and the faint light from the gas jet gleamed redly on the big blade he held in his hand.

It was so murderous-looking that any one, whose nerves were not like iron, would have been forced to betray the fear which it was sure to produce; but the sport snored on, even as Scaley crept toward the head of the bed.

For a minute—a nerve-trying minute—Scaley stood looking down at the man he meant to slay.

Not a ray of repentance, or horror of the deed contemplated, shone on his cruel visage.

Then he lifted the knife to strike.

But the eyes behind those half-closed lids had watched with a keenness that could not be surpassed. They read the very thoughts of the villain's heart, and they noted the first movement of the knife-hand.

Quick as a flash, and without a premonitory movement, there was an upward thrust of the sport's right hand, as the knife was drawn back for the blow.

The knife-hand of the would-be murderer was caught and drawn forward with resistless force; and, before Scaley Castro comprehended that the man he meant to kill was wide awake and ready to do battle, Scaley was jerked almost from his feet and drawn across the bed.

At the same instant, the other hand of the Crescent City Sport shot out with almost the force of a pile-driver.

Scaley was hardly given time to gasp his fear or do aught to release himself.

The sport's hand was doubled up, and was almost as hard as a knobbed iron ball.

It caught Scaley near the base of the ear and knocked him across the bed, hurling him almost to the other end.

But the rascal had a skull that was proof against anything, short of a kick of a mule; and he sprung from the sport's grasp, and stood on the defensive, with the knife uplifted.

Scales was resolved that Castro should not escape.

With a bound, he was out from under the bed clothing, and had delivered another blow which brought Castro to his knees.

Then he threw himself on the villain and strove to bear him down and overwhelm him, for he saw that Castro was reaching for a pistol.

His own pistol and knife had been dropped, and lay now in the bed, beyond his reach.

The fight that ensued was of the liveliest character. Neither called for help, but each rolled over the other, clutching his adversary and striving in every way to gain some advantage.

Scaley endeavored to use his knife, but it was knocked from his grasp and flew across the room.

Then the iron fist of the sport, seeing an opening, shot out again; and this time the

hard knuckles caught Scaley in a tenderer spot and stretched him senseless.

Pantingly, the sport relieved himself of Castro's weight; and then stood above the unconscious form with folded arms.

A smile rested on his sweat-stained face.

"About as tough a scoundrel as I ever tackled! He came mighty near getting me! At one time I wasn't sure of living very long! He swung that knife as if he was used to the business!"

"But he's down; and now I must get some one to take him to jail! With him in jail, I'm ready to give Jep Hill a turn!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE GAMBLER'S LAST GAME.

In that same small room of the famous St. Charles, not more than a week later, two men sat at a table, engaged in a game of cards.

Outside, the lights of New Orleans gleamed; and the tides of humanity poured up and down St. Charles street, and that wider and grander thoroughfare, Canal street, as if the air of the city had felt no touch of pollution.

The time was now past midsummer, and the dreaded fever seemed to be increasing in virulence and activity.

Nevertheless, the people surged up and down the streets, the heavy wagons jarred and roared over the uneven pavements, and life went on for most people, as if nothing of a perilous character threatened.

The inevitable panic, that is one of the most noticeable things, now, when an epidemic occurs, did not make its certain appearance at the first tidings of danger, then. Perhaps people did not so fear Yellow Jack. At any rate, they acted as if they did not so fear him!

One of the men in that little room of the St. Charles Hotel was the St. Louis Sport; the other was a man of apparently middle age, with a heavy brown beard and keen restless eyes, who had given his name as Bruce Murdock.

They had met quite by chance, as it seemed, a week or two before; and had become close intimates.

More than once they had played—sometimes for sport, oftener for money; but now the Crescent City Sport emphasized his assertion that this was his last game.

The sport had been much touched by the suffering the present epidemic was causing; and had been liberal with his purse and with personal aid, putting himself to trouble to help wherever he thought help was needed.

Many, even of those benefited, said that he only used money which he gained gambling; that it went easy because it came easy; and that, if he was compelled to earn what he so liberally threw about, he would not be so free in his giving.

The sport had heard these things, more than once, and sometimes they had stung; but he had put the uncharitable assertions behind him and gone on with the work that his hands found to do.

But this work, meritorious as it was, did not give him rest and comfort. He sought it, let the truth be confessed! because it helped to distract his thoughts from the one subject that tended to engross them. He could, for a little while, forget that Fannie Mayport was a wanderer in that big and selfish place; that she was, perhaps, dead, or lying somewhere in the hot grip of the fever.

Whenever he had looked into the fever-filled face of a woman, he had half expected to behold the dear and well-remembered features of his first love.

Time and again he had talked to Ganderfoot of the things that filled his mind.

He and Ganderfoot could never become chums and cronies—their characters were too dissimilar; but he respected Ganderfoot's shrewdness and judgment and admired his honesty.

The present resolve of the Crescent City Sport to end his unwholesome and undesirable calling, had its root in two things: One was the love he bore the memory of Fannie Mayport; and the other concerned the man with whom he sat at table, that night, playing.

He hoped to accomplish a certain thing—felt sure he was on the verge of accomplishing

it—and then desired to forever quit the career that had been distasteful to Fannie Mayport, and had made him seem, in his own eyes, unworthy of her respect and love.

Bruce Murdock, who had evinced a wicked disposition all through the game, did not improve in his temper, as the play progressed.

But the sport was as cool as an autumn day. Nothing seemed to ruffle him. He watched every movement of his opponent with the eye of a hawk.

Suddenly there was a cry of fraud; it was raised by Bruce Murdock.

At the same moment that the cry rung out, Murdock pulled a big knife from his breast and struck furiously at the hand of the Crescent City Sport, which was then extended on the table.

It was clearly Murdock's intention to pin the sport's hand to the table with the knife, and thus have him at a disadvantage; but Scales was entirely too quick of eye and of movement for this effort to be a success.

His hand was withdrawn with lightning-swiftness, and the heavy knife buried itself in the hard wood.

Before Bruce Murdock could pull the knife away or rise to strike his opponent, the hand of the sport reappeared; and this time it held a pistol, that looked Bruce Murdock fairly in the face.

"Throw away that knife!" was the stern command. "Throw down that knife, I say, or by all the furies, I'll let daylight through your miserable, sneaking carcass!"

The sport was aroused to fury by Murdock's dastardly attempt.

Murdock, failing to get the knife out of table, lunged forward, and tried to strike the pistol out of the sport's hands.

Apparently this was the movement desired by the sport; for he was quick to take advantage of it.

Without once removing the pistol, he reached out with his left hand, and tore away, at a single sweep, the heavy brown beard that covered Murdock's face.

The beard had been but a disguise!

A cry of rage came from the lips of the man who had called himself Murdock, when he felt the beard plucked away and he knew that his disguise had been penetrated.

Then he tried to spring backward and away.

But the hand that had relieved him of his beard, hurled him, by a dextrous motion, to the floor; and there he lay, glaring up at the sport.

The eyes were protruding with fear, the face was livid, and the voice gasping.

But the eyes and the face and the voice were all, without doubt, Jep Hill's.

"You thought I didn't know you!" said the sport, with a sneer. "You were never more mistaken! I've known you for more than a week; and I've only been biding my time!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FORCED TO CONFESS.

As he heard those words, Jep Hill tried to leap up and away.

But the Crescent City Sport was thoroughly on his guard, and his weapon was leveled full at the wretch on the floor.

"Do you know that I'm mightily tempted to send a ball through your head? It would only be returning what you'd like to do to me!"

"You have been hanging on my track, covered with that disguise, hoping to get a chance to kill me, without exposing yourself!"

"There's no need to deny it, for I know it to be true!" as Hill seemed about to make a sweeping denial of everything charged. "I haven't been asleep, nor have my eyes closed. You thought to pin my hand with that knife, just now, and then hold me at your mercy! But the tables are turned!"

Jep Hill writhed in manifest fear, for he knew the things charged were true, and he had no reasonable grounds to hope that he would be shown mercy.

He put up his hands, as if he would by that act ward off the threatened bullet.

"No, I'm not going to kill you, Jep Hill! Not just now, at least! But I'm going to make you speak and write the truth! If you refuse, you'll suffer the consequences!"

More than once Jep had made an almost unnoticeable movement of his right hand toward his breast; and from this the Crescent City Sport knew that there was a pistol concealed where the knife had been.

"You know why you refused to meet me, that evening, in a duel by the river? I'll tell you! You knew that if I shot to kill, your life wasn't worth a moment's purchase. You saw me shoot that crow out of the top of the big cypress! You saw me tumble that alligator, in the bayou, by a shot in the eye! You saw me wing the quail, that got up in our path, one day!"

Jep Hill seemed to shrink within himself, more and more, and to become more helplessly terrified.

"The weapon with which I did those things is in my hands, and is pointed now, at your heart. It is a pistol that never fails. If I choose to touch this trigger, your life goes out as a candle that is snuffed!"

"I tell you all this in warning! I don't want to kill you, Jep Hill; but I'll do it, if I have to. I'll do it, if you drive me to it by any attempt at a counter stroke!"

"Now, pull that pistol out of your breast! I know it's there! Pull it out, with the muzzle toward you, and toss it into that corner!"

"I have no—"

"Do as I demand!"

Hill whitened. He had been counting on the use of that pistol, should the sport show an instant of inattention. He disliked to give it up, for that would leave him weaponless. The knife was already beyond his reach.

He glanced about, in a desperate way, searching, like a trapped rat, for some avenue of escape.

Nothing opened.

"Do as I command you!" came in the cold, hard tones of the Crescent City Sport.

Not a movement of the eye, or a tremor of a muscle was passing unobserved by him.

"Take out that pistol and toss it into that corner!"

Only for another second did the rascal hesitate. He saw the arm of the sport steady itself, as if for a more accurate aim. The sight sapped his last drop of courage.

"Don't shoot!" he gasped. "Of course, I'll do as you say. Don't shoot!"

His hand went into the bosom of his coat, and, when it came out, it held the weapon that had been hidden; but, the muzzle was turned toward his own breast and away from the sport.

"You're a wise man, after all!" came in the sport's collected voice. "I didn't know but you'd try to make a break. Now, down with it, in that corner!"

The weapon left Hill's hand and dropped to the floor beyond the clutch of his fingers.

"There's a desk and a chair, and some writing tools, over there!" the sport went on never altering his air. "And it will be a bit of wisdom on your part, now, if you'll shift to that part of the room, and seat yourself in front of that table."

"What do you mean?"

Hill's voice shook with unfeigned terror.

"No bodily harm. Your mask is off here in my presence, and I know you for what you are. I want others to enjoy the same knowledge, that's all! You understand?"

Hill began to whimper and to beg off.

"There's no getting out of it! You should be glad that I didn't retaliate on you by shooting you. You deserved that! Now, get into that chair!"

The sternness and cool courage of the Crescent City Sport completely unnerved the ruffian. He shook like a leaf, and seemed almost ready to fall down in a fit, so great was his fear.

Therefore when the the command was repeated, in that way, he half-rose from the floor, and shuffled along to the chair, into which he nervelessly dropped.

"You see that sheet of paper before you, and you see that pen and that ink?"

"Now, I propose to ask you some questions, to which you'll do well to give straight answers!"

Hill drew the sheet of paper toward him, with shaking fingers.

"You tried to bring my ruin, at the plantation, by pretending you were dead, and having your henchmen tell a story of how I had murdered you?"

There came no immediate answer.

The question was repeated, with still stronger emphasis.

"I did!" Hill confessed, when he saw he could do nothing else.

"Then, write it down!"

This was most distasteful, and might prove most perilous. Therefore, Hill still hesitated.

Again came the command, backed by a threat. Thereupon Hill scratched down the confession.

"You did that, because you were jealous of me?" questioned Scales.

Hill admitted that such was the case.

"Write it down!"

Again the pen scratched.

"It is down!"

"Read to me all that you've written!"

The confession was read, in a quivering voice.

"You did it, for the further reason that you wanted to make a certain Hoosier detective, known as Gabe Ganderfoot, think you dead, and thereby induce him to abandon a chase that had troubled you?"

Hill seemed about to set up a denial.

"You killed a man in Jeffersonville, in a quarrel that grew out of a game of cards, last February! You would have been mobbed, only that you put out before a mob could gather! The deed was cold-blooded, and there's a chance that you may yet be hung for it! Gabe Ganderfoot came down on the River Queen, with you, sure that you were the right man, and arrested you at the plantation for the crime; but you got away!"

Hill sat as if glued to the chair.

"Those things are all true, are they not? You wanted to throw this detective off the track, and thought to do it by playing dead; at the same time thinking you could avoid meeting me in a duel, and cause my death on a false charge? Answer me! Aren't these things true?"

"They are true!" shivered the miserable culprit.

"Then, write 'em down!"

Again the pen scratched; and again was the confession read to the implacable sport.

"Now, tell me where Fannie Mayport is!"

"I don't know!"

"Where is Colonel Mayport?"

"I don't know!"

The tones showed that Hill was speaking the truth. He did not know, at this time!

"Sign the confession!"

Hill did it, with a sigh, and laid down the pen.

The sport stepped quickly toward him. A rope was in the sport's hands—a rope that had a neatly-formed slip-noose in one end.

"Put up your hands!"

The muzzle of the pistol almost touched Jep Hill's ear. It was a wonderful persuader!

Hill's hands went up, and the slip-noose dropped over them and was drawn tight; and then, almost before Jep realized it, he was a helpless prisoner.

"I've a certain friend who is looking for you, and who'll be tickled to death, when I turn you over into his charge! His name is Gabe Ganderfoot; so there'll be no need of an introduction! I told him to call here at eleven o'clock! You hurried me a little, and we got ahead of him, but he'll be here, now, soon!"

Hill had not a word in reply. All the life was crushed out of him, and all he could do was to crouch, shivering, in the chair, and listen, without replying, to the words of the Crescent City Sport.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

HARDLY were these statements made by the sport, when the sound of feet in the hallway announced the approach of the Hoosier Detective, Gabe Ganderfoot.

"Come in!" the sport invited, as Ganderfoot's knock rattled the door. "You're too late for the circus, but you're welcome!"

Thereupon Ganderfoot opened the door and walked in. An odd look rested on his face, when he saw Jep tied up by the table, and observed the pistol in the grasp of the sport.

"Allus my luck!" he growled, though his eyes twinkled. "I'm allus the hind boy in the percession—the under-dog in every fight, the—the man what's ferever gittin' left! How in Sam Hill did you do it?"

"I expected your help, of course," the sport replied, "but he was in such a hurry! He took my hand for a fly and tried to pin it to the table; and then—well, I couldn't remain quiet, after that!"

"I see!" said Ganderfoot. "Purty good at disguisin', wasn't he?" looking down at the big beard on the floor. "If he was honest, he might 'a' done well in the detective line. Detectives ain't allus what you'd call saints; but they've got to have some kind of moral back-bone, if they git along well!"

While delivering himself of this last, he walked to the side of Jep Hill, glanced curiously at the rope that held the villain's hands, and then, without removing the rope, took a shining pair of handcuffs from his pocket and snapped them on Hill's wrists.

The touch of the cold steel roused the prisoner to renewed terror.

"Take them off!" he pleaded. "Gentlemen, what's the use of torturing me this way? Take the things off! Just name the sum it is worth to you to remove these things and let me go, and you shall have it! Colonel Mayport will help me raise it for you!"

"I don't think he would!" averred Ganderfoot, in a knowing tone. "I recly don't think he'd do anything of the kind, sonny. So, I'm afeared you're in fer it! They's some people up in old Indianny that'll be glad to see you, and likely they'll be willin' to pay me handsome fer bringin' you to 'em. Tany rate, I've heered there's a purty good reward out fer a chap about your size!"

Hill shivered and collapsed.

A few words now put the detective in possession of such facts concerning the events of the evening as he wished to know; then he expressed a desire to convey Jep Hill to a certain prison—or police station—that was not far away, where Jep might be held till the proper papers were prepared against him and for his conduct northward.

"An' there's another thing!" and the solemn face of the detective fairly lighted, as he turned again to Winthrop Scales. "I've found the girl!"

Scales leaped to his feet, in great excitement.

"I held back the news till now because I knowed you'd have no head to talk of anything else, after that. Yes, I've found her. She's in a hospital. Not as a sick critter, but as a nuss. And she's wearin' her life out there fer the pore people that air dyin' of the fever!"

"And she's well?" the sport demanded.

"She says so, but she don't look it!"

The sport was already half forgetful of the prisoner.

"Let's go!" he cried. "Where is this hospital? Give me the street and number, and I'll hurry straight there! Is it in—"

"Wild as a buck, at the fust word, jist as I knowed he'd be! Take it cool, my boy! This ain't a good time to heat your blood! We'll go straight that way when we take this chap to the jail. Then, when he's landed all right, I'll walk on with you, and kinder smooth the way, you know, fer you must recollect that she's no more idea where you air, er whether you're at all, than you had of her, jist a bit ago!"

"Fannie!" called a feeble voice, and Fannie Mayport instantly responded.

Almost constantly the voice called, so that the girl, though one of the best nurses in the fever hospital, could give her attention to no other patient.

But she always responded with alacrity and joy, for the voice that called her was the voice of her father, Colonel Jackson Mayport—the tender voice of a loving and a forgiving father! A repentant voice, that held, in its weak and quivering tones, a suggestion of tears for the wrong done this daughter.

To explain her presence there:

Filled with fear, Fannie Mayport had left the tenement that had been her New Orleans home, and had fled out into the street, after that visit from Jep Hill.

There was no man she more feared than Hill; and the fact that he had found her

stopping-place in the city filled her with such terror that she willingly abandoned everything—even the friends she had there made, to escape him.

However, this wild flight was a desperate venture—quite as much so as that other wild flight, when she had left her father's house!

And she realized it before many hours, though she would not return to the tenement, or inform the people there of her straits and whereabouts.

She sought work, in vain. No doors opened willingly to her, and at length she reeled, fainting, in the streets, and was carried to a hospital.

When she regained her strength, she saw about her hundreds in need of assistance. Hospitals and charitable institutions were overflowing and the city was strained to supply nurses and help.

She saw before her her work, and took it up willingly and meekly. She did not fear the fever. There seemed very little left for her in life;—and a feeling that such is the case makes one eager, at times, to lay that life down!

But, the fever did not strike her. She toiled incessantly. No nurses there, even though thoroughly trained, could stand the strain that daily and nightly rested on her. She actually grew strong under it; she forgot her own woes in these other sufferings; her unselfish devotion seemed to shield her and guard her against harm. Apparently, her life became a charmed one.

Then—and the shock was great—her father was borne into the ward where she toiled, one day. He was in the clutches of the fever, and was unconscious, and had been found in that condition on the street.

Later, she knew he had been hopelessly searching for her, when thus stricken.

When he opened his eyes and beheld her bending over him, his heart became a fountain of tears. He was weak and child-like, and wept easily.

And then, ever afterward, when he was awake, his voice called:

"Fannie! Fannie. Come here, Fannie! Sit by me, Fannie! Let me hold your hand, Fannie!"

Over and over these requests were made, and Fannie joyfully acceded, happy in the thought that her father forgave her, and loved her still.

"An old friend, miss, to see ye! A friend that I hope you'll be glad to see—Mr. Winthrop Scales!"

Gabe Ganderfoot had made his way into the hospital, and to Fanny Mayport's side, even though the hour was late.

In the corridor, not far distant, feverishly awaiting the result of Ganderfoot's interview, was Winthrop Scales, the Crescent City Sport.

Colonel Mayport's eyes were wide open. Though he was failing rapidly, he recognized the face and voice of the detective; and, when Fannie turned to him, as if to seek his consent, he smiled feebly and nodded.

Fannie's eyes shone like stars, while her pale cheeks became rose red, when Winthrop Scales entered the ward and advanced toward her.

Gabe Ganderfoot had discreetly withdrawn.

"It's all right!" confessed the colonel, in his weak voice, from the bed. "Take her, my boy! And you can't hurry the wedding too fast for me—for I know I'm not long for this world, and would like to see her your wife before I go! That scoundrel, Jep Hill—"

He began to grow angry at the recollection of Hill, and choked so that Fannie turned back toward the cot.

But he recovered, almost instantly; and, when Scales sought to fold her in a loving embrace, she did not withdraw.

And the colonel, who would have fallen down in an apoplectic fit, if he had witnessed that when on the plantation, smiled on them and tried to utter a blessing.

"I'm going fast," he said, when they stood together above him. "Give me your hand, Fannie! It may be too late; directly. My mind fails me now, and I reel away into nothingness."

"I want you to marry this man, Fannie,

if he is your life choice; and I want you to marry him now, and here, before me! I'll not be alive in the morning! I feel it and know it!"

It was an unexpected and a solemn request. A wedding in that chamber of horrors seemed so wholly out of place!

But, Ganderfoot was made aware of the wish of the father, and hastened away for the legal authority and a minister.

The preacher came, in due season; and the marriage ceremony was witnessed by the dying man.

"You have my blessing!" Mayport cried. "And again I beg your forgiveness!"

But why prolong the description of a scene that held more of sadness than of joy?

The spirit of Colonel Mayport went out, with the coming of the day; but his last conscious moments were sweetened by the knowledge that he had tried to repair the great wrong done his daughter, and that she had freely and fully forgiven him.

Scaley Castro and the other members of the band of river thieves who had been made prisoners, with the exception of Jepsey Hill, were punished for their crimes by being imprisoned for varying terms and made to do hard convict duty in Louisiana.

As for Hill, he was taken to Jeffersonville, Indiana, the scene of the murder by him committed, and was there given trial and was convicted; and there he was forced to labor for life, almost within sight of the spot where the murder was committed.

It was Ganderfoot who took him back to Indiana and produced the evidence on which the conviction was based; and Ganderfoot received the reward there offered for Hill's arrest, and felt he had earned it.

This was not his last, as it was not his first, successful detective work; and for a long period the name of Gabe Ganderfoot, the great Hoosier Detective, was feared by the thugs and thieves of the river.

The wedding so strangely solemnized in the hospital and under the blessing of a dying man proved one of the happiest, and Mr. and Mrs. Winthrop Scales passed many pleasant and contented years on their Mississippi plantations, beloved by their servants, their neighbors and their children!

THE END.

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